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FREE TOTAL GUIDE TO FAMILY CRUISING

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Fun is at the heart of every CARNIVAL SHIP. The Carnival Vista is no exception. Built to inspire big fun among our guests, the Carnival Vista lets the good times flow in an open and inviting environment that takes Fun Ship 2.0 to new heights. From the all new spacious family suites and supped-up SportSquare, to the first ever IMAX theatre at sea, there's plenty of room for everyone to gather around for a great time.

But when friends and families set sail aboard the Carnival Vista, they're getting more than a memory-filled holiday. They're getting a CONNECTION TO THE OCEAN; a place where salty breezes and spectacular views linger around every corner.

The Carnival Vista brings the indoors to the outdoors, letting cruisers soak up every moment of sun and every ounce of enjoyment they can. With numerous open spaces that blend fresh air with comfortable accommodations, it's easy to see why this ship's in a FLEET ALL ITS OWN.

OH, AND IT'S GOING TO BE IN EUROPE!!!

WITH NEW & IMPROVED SPACES

IMAX Theatre



SkyRide



Havana Pool



Havana Cabanas



Bonsai Sushi



Seafood Shack



For the first time ever Carnival Vista will feature the Carnival Multiplex, made up of not one, but two theatres! Firstly, there is an actual IMAX Theatre in all its big-screen, big-fun glory... the first of its kind you'll find anywhere at sea. And secondly, it's Thrill Theater, the 3D experience where jump-off-the-screen visuals are only the beginning of a truly moving experience.

She's also got the amazing SportSquare, where you'll find the all-new SkyRide. Strap in and zip around a bike course high above the deck. The Clubhouse features indoor activities like mini-bowling and arcade-style basketball, or push yourself to amazing new heights at SkyCourse.

Not forgetting our most exciting Carnival WaterWorks to date! Our aqua park features a new addition to the fleet, the Kaleid-o-slide, our first ever tube water slide.

We've also added some great new stateroom options. Travelling with your family? Be sure to book one of our new Family Harbor staterooms and suites. These special rooms were designed to make family travel a breeze and feature a unique nautical décor, great family perks, and a private lounge just for you. Our new Havana staterooms and suites offer you lots of spice, Cuban style.

We've even added al fresco dining to our most popular speciality restaurants so you can dine with an uninterrupted view of the sea.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT YOUR TRAVEL AGENT.
ALTERNATIVELY, CALL RESERVATIONS ON 0845 351 0556
OR GO ONLINE AT WWW.CARNIVAL.CO.UK/CARNIVALVISTA**

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CONTENTS

FEBRUARY/MARCH 2015

EDITOR'S LETTER



Welcome to the fabulous new issue of the UK's best-selling cruise magazine. Whether you're a cruise virgin or you want to add to your collection of sea passes, you'll find loads of ideas to inspire you and help you choose, book and plan your cruise holiday.

Cruises are brilliant for families – they're fantastic value, your kids (and you) will never run out of things to do on a ship, plus it's a chance to take them to some of the world's most amazing places, all on one holiday. We asked the experts for their top tips for family cruises – turn to page 61 for our must-read guide.

For many of us a Caribbean cruise is the perfect getaway, and on page 47 we've selected 50 superb cruises to the islands for the year ahead.

On page 29 you can find out more about the stunning state-of-the-art ocean ships set to make waves over the next 18 months. And on page 90 we've chosen the Best European River Cruises.

Also in this issue we have exclusive interviews with celebrity chef James Martin and Elisabeth von Trapp, plus recipes from TV's Phil Vickery.

And you could win a Mediterranean cruise with MSC Cruises – turn to page 82 for details of how to enter.

Enjoy,

Liz Jarvis, Editor

liz.jarvis@cruise-international.com



UP FRONT

- 8 HOT SPOT**
Cranbrook Flower Forest in Saint Ann, Jamaica, is 130 acres of lush greenery – there's even a zip line through the canopy

FEATURES

- 24 JAMES MARTIN**
The P&O Food Hero talks about launching the first cookery school at sea on *Britannia*, and taking his first holiday three years ago
- 26 PHIL VICKERY**
TV chef and *Saga Sapphire*'s new guest chef shares two of his favourite recipes
- 29 NEW OCEAN SHIPS**
From *Carnival Vista* to *Viking Star*, and *Norwegian Escape* to P&O's *Britannia*, we preview the new ocean ships making waves
- 43 BIGGER AND BETTER**
After receiving an extensive refurbishment at the Fincantieri shipyard in Sicily, *MSC Armonia* is more impressive than ever
- 61 TOTAL GUIDE TO FAMILY CRUISES**
Entertainment, excursions and more... here are our top tips for taking children of all ages on their first family cruise
- 75 CRUISES FOR CULTURE VULTURES**
A look at the impressive enrichment programmes offered by some of the world's grandest ocean cruise lines
- 84 TOKYO CITY GUIDE**
Discover a mix of historic charm and modernism in the vibrant Japanese capital
- 90 THE BEST EUROPEAN RIVER CRUISES 2015**
We round up the new itineraries, ships and unforgettable excursions for this year, from the glorious landscapes along the Rhine to the endless wonders of the Douro Valley
- 104 WINE ON THE RHINE**
Julie Peasgood and her daughter experience a cruise along Europe's grandest river on board *AmaCerto*

COMPETITION

- 82 WIN A MED CRUISE WITH MSC**
You and a guest could be sailing around the Mediterranean on *MSC Fantasia* on a spectacular seven-night itinerary

FEBRUARY/MARCH 2015

Cruise international

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24 CONTENTS

CARIBBEAN CRUISES SPECIAL

47 TOP 50 CARIBBEAN CRUISES

We look at the best cruise-and-stay options in
one of the world's favourite destinations

56 THE WOW FACTOR

Broadcaster Katy Hill enjoys her first family
cruise on board *Allure of the Seas*

70 HERE COMES THE FUN

A mum and her daughter take their first
cruise on *Carnival Freedom*

REGULARS

11 CRUISE NEWS

Carnival returns to Europe and a Royal
godmother for *Britannia*?

16 CRUISE STYLE

Best fashion, fragrances and beauty buys

22 CRUISE WELL

The latest health and wellbeing news

86 RIVER CRUISE NEWS

A royal godmother for Uniworld's *S.S. Maria
Theresa*, plus Scenic Tours' latest Super Ships

110 ASK THE EXPERTS

Your cruise holiday questions answered

113 YOUR CRUISE PHOTOS

114 CELEBRITY TRAVELS

Singer Elisabeth von Trapp on her favourite
places, plus the real Maria



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QUEEN VICTORIA

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* \$500pp is based on a Balcony Stateroom on 14-night Mediterranean cruises, departing 1, 8, 15 & 22 August 2015 (cruise numbers V518, V518D, V519 & V519D). Book by 28 February 2015. Offer is only applicable on new Cunard Fare bookings, on selected cruises departing May - November 2015.



Hot spot

CRANBROOK, SAINT ANN, JAMAICA

Located 18 miles west of Ocho Rios, historic Cranbrook Flower Forest is 130 acres of lush grounds where visitors can admire the incredible flora, hike along a river path, swim in cooling pools, take a zip line tour through the forest canopy and even play croquet. Among the species of flower grown here are hibiscus, begonias and birds of paradise, and there's also an orchid hothouse. Saint Ann, one of the oldest populated areas on Jamaica and the largest parish, dates back to 600-650 AD. It's known for its outstanding natural beauty and is often described as 'the Garden Parish of Jamaica'.

>> Turn to page 47 to read about cruises to the Caribbean





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CRUISE *News*

SHIPS • EVENTS • DESTINATIONS

CARNIVAL RETURNS TO EUROPE



Carnival has unveiled details of its new ship, *Carnival Vista*, and revealed it will be returning to Europe for the first time in three years. The ship will be sailing round the Mediterranean in May 2016, with ports of call including Italy, France, Spain, Croatia and Turkey, as well as several new destinations for Carnival such as Crete (Heraklion) and Corfu, Greece; Valletta, Malta; Palermo, Sicily; Cagliari, Sardinia; and Gibraltar. It will then make a transatlantic crossing to New York in October 2016 before embarking on voyages from the Big Apple.

For more on the innovations on board *Carnival Vista* turn to page 31.



UPGRADE YOUR NEW YORK FLIGHTS

Travellers on one of the 12 daily British Airways flights to New York can now upgrade to First one way when booking an eligible return seat in Club World. Return tickets start from £399pp, including taxes and charges. Book before 13 March 2015 and travel up to 11 April 2015. For more information visit ba.com, book via a travel agent or call BA on 0844 493 0787.



PHOTOS: © IStock

ROYAL GODMOTHER FOR BRITANNIA?



As *Cruise International* was going to press rumours were circulating that HM The Queen will be the godmother of P&O's new ship *Britannia*. Her Majesty is godmother to P&O's *Oriana* (as well as Cunard's *Queen Elizabeth* and *Queen Mary 2*), and the Royal Diary indicates she plans to be in Hampshire on 10 March, the day of the Christening.

She certainly appears on a painting by artist Johnny Bull commissioned to commemorate *Britannia*, but then so do Dame Helen Mirren (godmother to P&O's *Ventura*), Victoria Beckham, pop singer Adele and JK Rowling (see left) We can't wait to find out who has been chosen - we'll reveal the identity on cruise-international.com.

Meanwhile, you may have spotted actor and comedian Rob Brydon fronting the cruise line's ad campaign. "P&O Cruises is a classic British brand and I was delighted to be asked to work with them," Rob said. "Filming on board was great fun."

For more on *Britannia*, turn to page 40.



PAMPER WHEN YOU FLY

Going on a fly-cruise from Heathrow T2, T3, T4 and T5, Gatwick South, Stansted, Glasgow or Edinburgh? Pay a visit to World Duty Free, where customers can enjoy complimentary beauty express beauty treatments from brands such as Jo Malone, Benefit, Kiehl's, Clarins, Yves Saint Laurent and many more. Treatments range from hand massages to mini facials to complete makeovers. You'll also find a complimentary Tasting Destination

Bar within the drinks section, where you can try spirits and cocktails.

For more info go to worlddutyfree.com ➤



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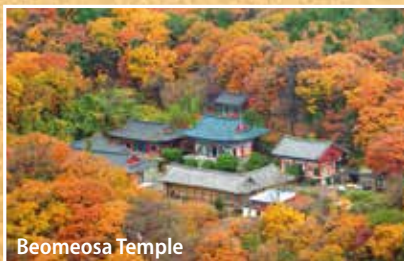
Busan

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Haeundae Beach

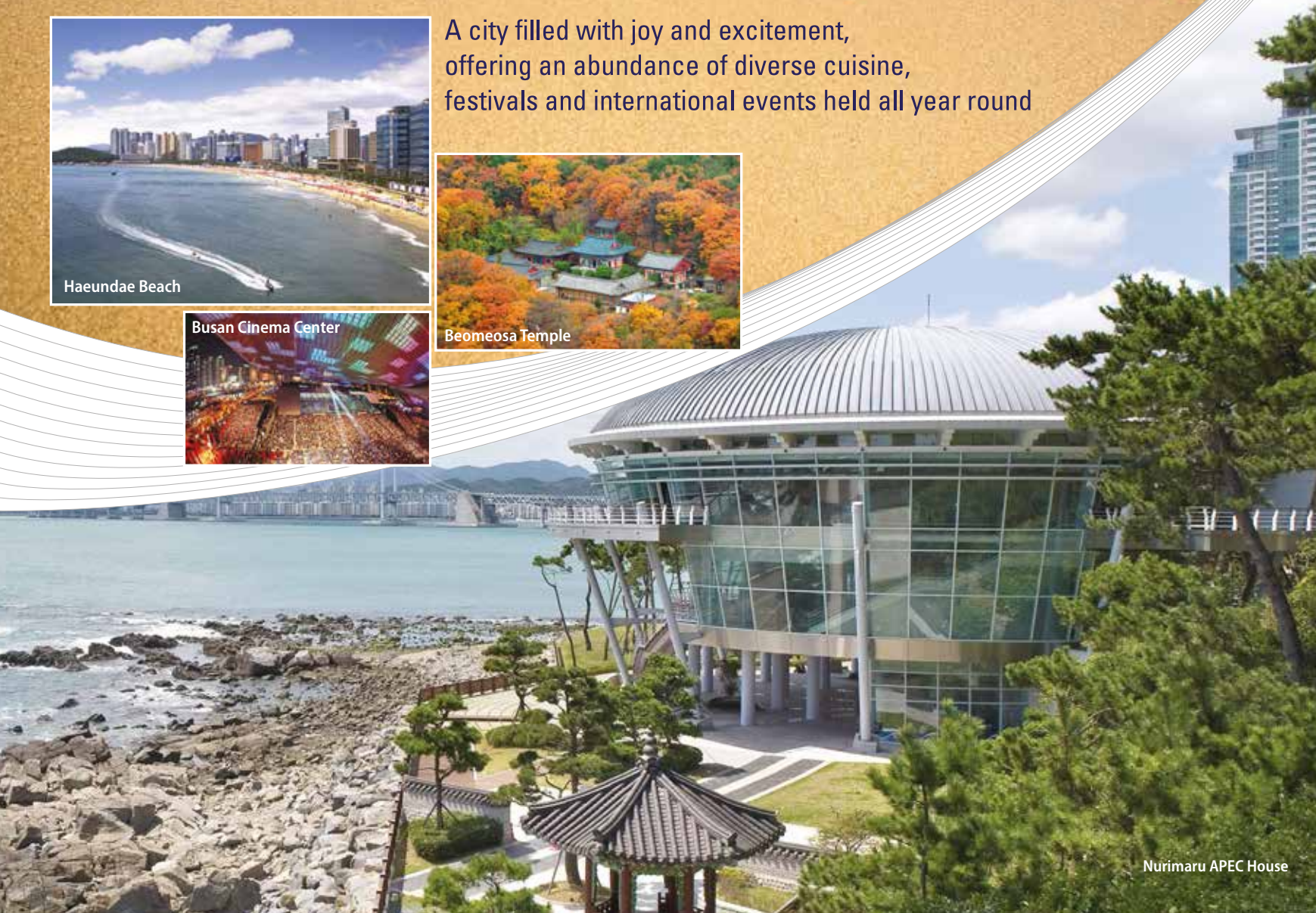
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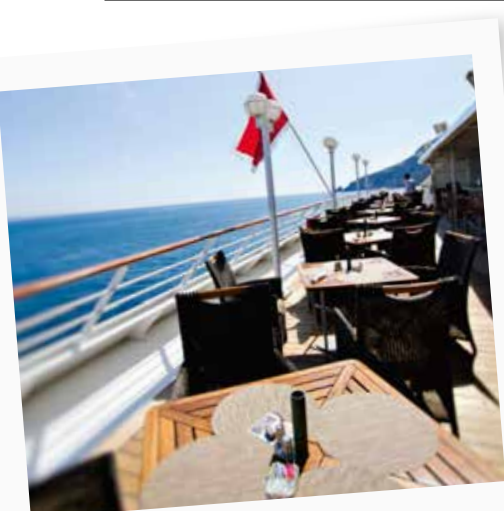
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AUSTRALIA TO ASIA WITH AZAMARA

Azamara Club Cruises has unveiled its 2017 itineraries, including the addition of four new ports: Kaikoura, New Zealand; Mahé, Seychelles; Yucatán, Mexico and George Town, Grand Cayman, in the Cayman Islands. New voyages include *Australia to Asia*, *Southern California to South Beach* and *Pearls Along the Indian Ocean*.

"Azamara's itineraries are designed to appeal to curious explorers, and we've got some exciting new offerings that will appeal to first time cruisers as well as our loyal guests," said Richard Twynam, managing director, Azamara Club Cruises UK & Ireland. "The 2017 voyages on offer early showcase Azamara's focus

on destination immersion; new programmes such as *Cruise Global*, *Eat Local* and exciting maiden ports in the *Seychelles* and *New Zealand*, will inspire guests long after their holiday with us."



VIKING'S CHELSEA GARDEN DESIGN



Following the success of their award-winning artisan Norse Garden at last year's RHS Chelsea Flower Show, Viking Cruises has revealed plans for its garden at this year's event.

The Viking Ocean Cruises Show Garden, created by TV garden designer Alan Gardner will convey the energy, colour and dynamism of the ocean, and celebrates the launch of Viking Cruises' first ocean ship, *Viking Star*.

Alan said: "I enjoy taking inspiration for my gardens from a wide range of concepts, and taking cues from Vikings' Nordic heritage has been fantastic."

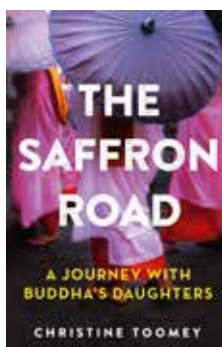
Wendy Atkin-Smith, Managing Director of Viking Cruises UK said: "We are delighted to be returning to Chelsea with a Show Garden and to be working with Alan, an ambassador for the Autistic Society, which we have chosen to support as our dedicated charity this year. As part of this, we will be gifting Alan's garden to numerous different gardens belonging to the Autistic Society after the Chelsea Flower Show."

Holiday Reads



***Nobody Is Ever Missing: Catherine Lacey* (Granta, £12.99)**

Catherine Lacey's debut novel follows Elyria as she abandons her glamorous New York life for the mountains of New Zealand. This gripping read might just be the next *Gone Girl*.



***The Saffron Road: A Journey with Buddha's Daughters: Christine Toomey* (Granta, £14.99)**

Fascinating stories from award-winning journalist Christine Toomey who travels East to West meeting women who have dedicated their lives to Buddhism.



***Strange Weather in Tokyo: Hiromi Kawakami* (Portobello Books, £7.99)**

A small but perfectly formed enigmatic novel about an unlikely love affair blossoming across generations, this is a charming and funny take on old-fashioned romance in modern Japan.



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CRUISE *Style*

Our pick of the hottest fashion buys for your trip



PRECIOUS GEM

Add some glamour on formal night with a bold jewel-encrusted clutch (£179.95, modainpelle.com).



GREEN ENVY

Be a bathing beauty in this flattering designer J by Jasper Conran swimsuit (£42, debenhams.com).



SPARKLING SHELLS

These shimmery earrings will go with everything (£42, argentlondon.com).

SHADY LADIES

Protect your eyes from the glaring sun in style (Miu Miu sunglasses from £155, sunglassshut.com).



Tropical glam

RED HOT

We love the classic cross design of these red sandals (£32, next.co.uk).



Keep cool in the Caribbean heat in a jungle-inspired shift (£90, bettybarclay.com).

TOUCHWOOD

Adorn your arms with chic wooden bangles (£16, oliverbonas.com).





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This divine selection of essentials from Clarins includes their famous Beauty Flash Balm (available from World Duty Free).



Beauty Lab's innovative new Tripeptide Collagen Lip Plump will give you a luscious pout (£15, beautylabshop.com).



We're crazy about Electric's hair care range – it really works, and the travel kit is fab (£18.50, harveynichols.com).

TAKE *always*

These beauty must-haves are the perfect size to take in your hand luggage



The White Glo Traveller's Pack is perfect for cleaning your teeth when you're travelling – much better than the flimsy kit you get given on planes (£2.99, whiteglo.com).



Smell delicious with this Georgio Armani Acqua di Gioia Miniature set of aquatic fragrances (available from World Duty Free).



Billed as the LBD for lashes, Estée Lauder's multi-purpose Little Black Primer is the ultimate base, can be worn as a light mascara and is also a water-resistant topcoat (available from World Duty Free).



MAC's new Red, Red, Red collection features a glorious palette of scarlet tones, from tomato and raspberry to coral and soft rose (available from Travel Retail locations worldwide).

Go online: For more style ideas go to cruise-international.com/category/cruise-style-blog/

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 Concierge Veranda Stateroom now from £2599

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SPLASH OUT

A camcorder is fab for capturing wonderful holiday memories, and this genius Sony number is splashproof (£329, sony.co.uk).



ACTOR CARY GRANT ON THE DECK OF A SHIP CIRCA 1955



WELL-GROOMED

Get a closer shave with the amazing Braun Series 7 electric razor - it has Sonic Technology and Precision Comfort Blades, and more computing technology than NASA's Apollo 11 (£299.99, braun.com).



HERE COMES THE SUN

Keep track of your bags with a luxury leather Sunrise Tag from Tumi (£50, amara.com).

LET'S *go*

Our pick of the hottest buys for your travels



TIME PIECE

Christopher Ward's new Trident designs are both sophisticated and sturdy (£799, christopherward.co.uk).

PURPLE HAZE

The sleek purple sheen of this Lipault bag will help you quickly spot it on the carousel (£149, selfridges.com).



ON THE CASE

Techair's clever 'Eazy Stand' universal tablet case will protect and also fold back on itself for simplicity (from £19.99, techair.co.uk).

Go online: For more style ideas go to cruise-international.com/cruise-style

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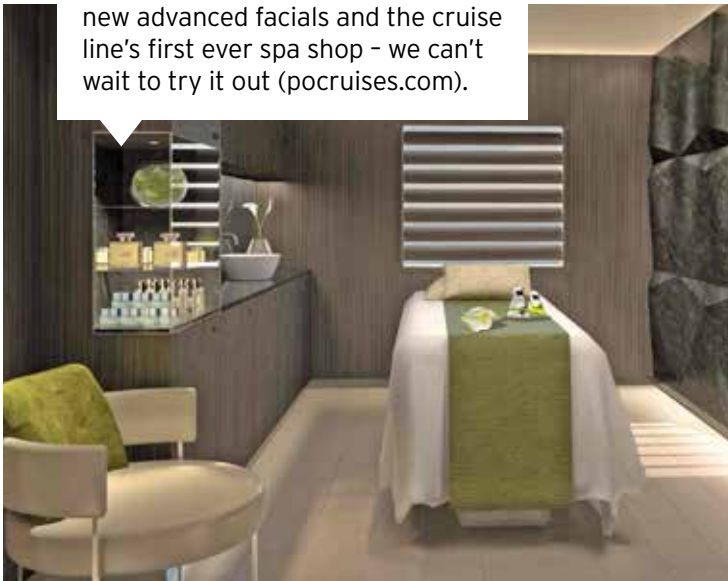


CRUISE *Well*

Every issue we bring you the latest health and wellbeing news

IN YOUR ELEMENT

When P&O's much-anticipated newest ship *Britannia* launches in March, its opulent Oasis Spa is set to be a major onboard attraction. Sumptuous dark wood, a whirlpool and treatments from much-loved British brand Elemis, plus seven new advanced facials and the cruise line's first ever spa shop – we can't wait to try it out (pocruises.com).

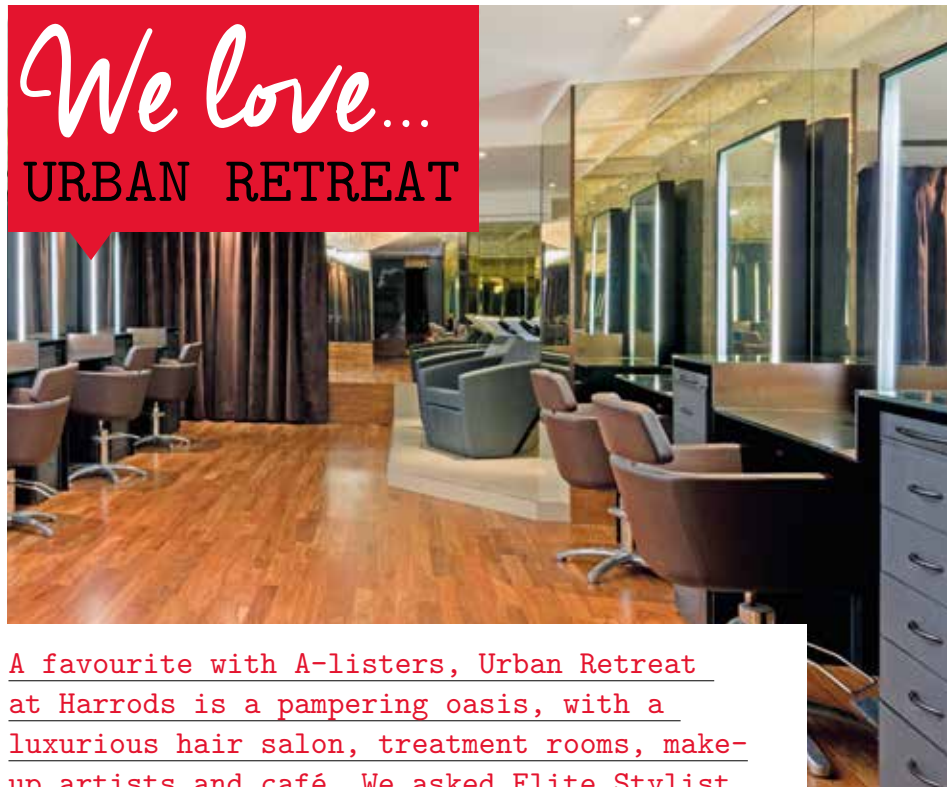


COCONUT POWER

One of the best things about a Caribbean cruise is all that fresh coconut. But did you know it's good for you? Not only can coconut prevent tooth decay, the milk is ideal for rehydrating; Canyon Ranch spa, available on Celebrity, Cunard and Oceania ships, recommends massaging a teaspoon of Coconut oil into the hair once a week.



We love... URBAN RETREAT



A favourite with A-listers, Urban Retreat at Harrods is a pampering oasis, with a luxurious hair salon, treatment rooms, make-up artists and café. We asked Elite Stylist JP Dos Santos for his top hair care tips for those heading off on a Caribbean cruise. "I recommend using products containing argan oil when you're out in the sun," he told us. "This natural protector will leave your hair soft and protect UV rays from damaging the hair. And the number one item that any woman must have in their handbag during a summer holiday is the Kérastase Micro-Voile Protecteur," (£19 for 125ml). Urban Retreat at Harrods, (urbanretreat.co.uk).

FUZZ FREE

If the thought of waxing makes you wince, next time you're cruising from Dublin or London visit Wax in the City. These bright, modern walk-in salons offer treatments using natural beeswax and tree oil – and trust us, it's painless (wax-in-the-city.com).



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[EXCLUSIVE]

“MY FIRST HOLIDAY WAS *three years ago*”

He's one of P&O's Food Heroes and will be running the first British cookery school at sea on board new ship *Britannia*. Here **James Martin** talks to Lynn Houghton about his roots

My father was a pig farmer in Yorkshire where I was born and raised. I came from a family full of chefs but they only ever worked with the food that we couldn't sell. My mother, my aunty and gran were all great cooks, and they did amazing things with cheap cuts of meat like pig's cheeks. I learned early on that the art of cooking is being able to work with anything and create something special. I was surrounded by food and cooking all the time when I was growing up; even my father was a caterer for the Castle Howard Estate.

When I was 10, I started working in a restaurant following the family tradition. Then, when I was a teenager, I went to the South of France to work at the Hotel de Plaisance restaurant. I worked with snails and cooked them the entire summer. I learned to love snails – I'm excited that they are now available in the UK.

I failed cookery at school. In fact, I never did well in any of my subjects at school because I am severely dyslexic. But luckily, Ken Allison spotted me at catering college and took me under his wing.

When I moved to London, I worked 24/7. I rarely saw daylight. But I loved it and I just kept at it. I worked in the kitchens of 190 Queensgate, followed by Dell'Ugo and also did a stint at Chewton Glen as head pastry chef. I was offered the position of head chef at the Hotel and Bistro du Vin in Winchester 20 years ago at the age of 22 and had to move out to the countryside when I took up the post. I have never looked back as the countryside is where I am happy.

I still live in the countryside near Winchester because I love space and peace and quiet. I also own a farm in Yorkshire and run the restaurant at the Talbot Hotel in Malton, North Yorkshire near where I grew up. To relax I go out walking with my two dogs, Ralph and Fudge, but, mainly, I walk around my restaurant – the other day I clocked 15 miles on the pedometer at work. Ralph and Fudge are white so I have to have them both cleaned constantly. A mobile groomer comes to my house and he washes both of them in the back of his van.

I went on holiday for the first time three years ago to the Maldives. I am really not the type to sit around on a sun lounger so I went on a 12-night foodie tour where I visited restaurants that my friends own. I also visited India during the same trip, again, to explore the food and get to know the people. I discovered wonderful places like Kerala with its rivers and lush scenery. The seafood in India is beautiful, I can't wait to go back and try it again.

I used to work with the cruise line Ocean Village many years ago and considered going out to Australia when the cruise line moved there as I really enjoyed the work. But *Saturday Kitchen* came my way at the same time, so I decided to stay in the UK. P&O Cruises approached me a while back about being involved with their new ship, *Britannia*, but I had no idea who else would be part of the group, who else would be a 'Food Hero'. I was just asked if I wanted to be involved and have a say in the food on the ship. Then I found out that the other Food Heroes are Eric Lanlard, Marco Pierre White, Atul Kochhar and wine expert Olly Smith. Being a consultant is a huge challenge as there are 3,000 meals going out every morning, noon and evening. I'm involved in everything, from the design of the benches to the spoons, knives, forks, blenders, plates, cookery, crockery – it's a very personal thing.

I'll be on the ship twice or three times a month to ensure that all is going to plan. I'm also in charge of The Cookery Club, doing my own cookery demonstrations to teach people, young and old, how to cook. And we'll have a Chef's Table so in the evening you can have dinner. But we're also going to involve a few of my friends so about once a month we'll bring out a named person to do the cookery school and make it unique – there won't be anywhere else like that. I'm going through my black book now looking at all my names and thinking 'they're definitely coming', so it's going to be pretty good. Starting with a blank sheet of paper makes it even more exciting. It's going to be a good journey. 🍷

The new series of James Martin: Home Comforts is on BBC Two. Cruise International readers can buy James Martin's Home Comforts at the special price of £15 (RRP £20), with free p&g. To order, call 01256 302699 quoting reference CW2 and your credit card details.

GETTING THERE

P&O's *Britannia* launches in March 2015 and James Martin will be on board on the following dates: 14 to 28 March (cruise is now sold out), 13 to 27 June, 6 to 18 July, 14 to 25 September and 9 to 23 October. To book your place, visit pocruises.co.uk or call 0843 373 0111.



Go online: Try out one of James Martin's recipes at cruise-international.com/james-martin-recipes

Flavour

FEST



TV chef Phil Vickery will be guest chef on board Saga Sapphire this summer. Here he shares two of his favourite recipes



The best way to cook sweet potato for recipes like this is to bake for about 50 minutes. The flesh will shrink away from the skin, and the reduction of the original raw volume will sweeten and intensify the flavour of the sweet potato. It also reduces the amount of water in the potato, so you can get away with using only a small amount of xanthan gum to help the finished texture.

ROASTED SWEET POTATO & CHOCOLATE MUFFINS SERVES 12

PREPARATION TIME

- 15 minutes

COOKING TIME

- 1 hour, 10 minutes

FREEZER

- Yes, cooked and cooled

INGREDIENTS

150g caster sugar
2 medium eggs
200g all-purpose flour
2 tsp gluten-free baking powder
½ tsp xanthan gum
150ml olive oil
1 tsp glycerine
200g roasted sweet potato flesh, mashed with a fork (from 1 large raw sweet potato)
20g chopped bitter chocolate
20g chopped white chocolate

METHOD

- Pre heat the oven to 160°C/gas 3.
- Bake the sweet potato for 50 minutes, until soft. Cool slightly, then peel and mash with a fork. Set the potato aside to cool.
- Increase oven temperature to 180°C/gas 4.
- Place the eggs and sugar into a food mixer and whisk on high speed until thick and foamy for about 5 minutes. Place the flour, baking powder and gum into a separate bowl and mix well.
- Place the oil and glycerine into another bowl and whisk well.
- Place the sweet potato flesh into the flour, gum and baking powder, mix, chop through with a spoon or fork, and break up so the mixture is half mixed together.
- Add the oil mix to the eggs. Add the flour and sweet potato, and mix well, but lightly.
- Spoon into 12 muffin cakes and bake for 20 minutes, or until mixture is well risen and lightly browned.
- Remove the tray from the oven and cool on a wire rack.



STICKY LIME CHICKEN SERVES 4

PREPARATION TIME

- 10 minutes

COOKING TIME

- 30 minutes

INGREDIENTS

8-12 chicken drumsticks

FOR THE GLAZE

2 cloves of garlic, peeled and chopped finely
1 small onion, peeled and chopped finely

150g brown sugar

75ml soy sauce

250ml apple juice

finely grated zest of 4 large limes and juice

1 tbsp cornflour

2 tbsp cold water

METHOD

- Place the drumsticks into a saucepan and cover with cold water.
- Add a little salt and bring to the boil, then turn down the heat and gently simmer for 20-25 minutes, or until cooked - soft, but not falling off the bone. Strain well and leave to cool, then chill.
- Meanwhile place all the ingredients for the glaze into a saucepan and bring to the boil. Simmer until you have roughly half the original volume.
- Mix the cornflour and water together and stir into the sauce to thicken, then cool.
- When ready to re-cook, heat the barbecue or grill and lightly oil the chilled chicken so that it doesn't stick.
- Brown well on one side, then spoon over half the glaze (the other half is used as a dipping sauce).
- Turn over to re-glaze and barbecue until nice and sticky and well-coloured.
- Serve with the remaining sauce. 🍴

SEE PHIL'S COOKING DEMONSTRATION

Phil Vickery will be on board *Saga Sapphire* for the *Adriatic Explorer* cruise. A 25-night cruise departing from Dover on 30 May, 2015 costs from £5,054pp, including UK travel to and from Dover, all meals and entertainment, all onboard gratuities, portage, travel insurance, additional cancellation cover, and much more. Visit saga.co.uk for more information or call 0800 061 3355.



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NEW OCEAN SHIPS



From Carnival Vista to Viking Star, and Norwegian Cruise Line's Escape to P&O's Britannia, the new ocean ships making waves offer the latest in innovation, style and extraordinary experiences at sea. Here's a closer look at what you can expect on board...



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CARNIVAL VISTA

When Carnival's newest ship starts sailing in May 2016 it will mark the cruise line's return to Europe after an absence of three years; and it will also be the largest liner in the fleet. Innovations on board will include the world's first IMAX® Theatre on a ship, and an expanded water park featuring the colourful Kaleid-O-Slide, the line's first raft-riding water tube slide. There's also the SkyRide, a pedal-powered aerial attraction where the most adventurous and brave-hearted guests can cycle their way round the 800ft-suspended track which features panoramic views from 150 feet above the sea.

More innovations come in the form of the staterooms: *Carnival Vista* will offer two classes of accommodation, including the Tropics-inspired Havana Cabanas, which have their own private patios, and the new Family Harbour accommodation, which can sleep up to five. A definite plus.

Carnival Cruise Lines favourites including Guy's Burger Joint and the RedFrog Pub will be on board, but the new ship will also boast the cruise line's first brewery at sea; new restaurants include the Seafood Shack, an indoor/outdoor dining venue featuring fresh seafood dishes.

Carnival Vista will be the second ship in the fleet to feature Dr Seuss Bookville; and for adults, the Serenity Retreat has been expanded to offer the line's first outdoor massage huts, as well as even more space to chill out and take in the vista (carnival.co.uk). ➤





THE SERENITY RETREAT HAS BEEN EXPANDED TO OFFER CARNIVAL'S FIRST OUTDOOR MASSAGE HUTS WITH MORE SPACE TO TAKE IN THE VISTA



This page, clockwise, from above: The expanded Serenity Retreat; the world's first IMAX® Theatre on a ship; the Havana Cabana suite features extra floor space, a 'rain shower' and an outside hammock.

Facing page, clockwise, from top left: Havana Plaza; the Horizons restaurant; the Piano Bar; sweet shop Cherry on Top will feature a mixed-to-order ice cream sundae bar ►►





NORWEGIAN ESCAPE



With its sealife-themed livery, the first ship in Norwegian Cruise Line's new Breakaway Plus Class, *Norwegian Escape* debuts in November 2015, taking 4,200 guests to destinations across the Caribbean.

Adrenalin junkies will be able to go wild on the largest ropes course at sea, featuring a zip track that lets you glide through the air; and an enormous aqua park with Free Fall waterslide and surprises galore (watch out for water cannons) as well as a themed mini-golf course.

For relaxation, The Mandara Spa offers the cruise line's first snow room and the largest Thermal Suite at sea, with 17 heated loungers, hydrotherapy pool, whirlpools, steam room, dry sauna and salt room. Adults can enjoy the seclusion of the Vibe Beach Club and Spice H2O, with a grotto area for cooling off after sunbathing on sea days.

Norwegian Escape also offers the line's signature luxury ship-within-a-ship complex, The Haven by Norwegian, along with the Studios, designed and priced for solo travellers, and more options for families. Dining and entertainment will include the first floating Jimmy Buffett's Margaritaville restaurant and private dining at Taste, and Miami's legendary bar, Tobacco Road. *Norwegian Escape* will also feature the 5 O'Clock Somewhere Bar, a music venue and outdoor space on The Waterfront with live performances showcasing the sounds of the tropics (ncl.co.uk). ➤





ADULTS CAN ENJOY THE SECLUSION OF THE VIBE BEACH CLUB AND SPICE H2O, WITH A GROTTO AREA FOR COOLING OFF

Clockwise, from above: 678 Ocean Place connects three decks of daytime and evening entertainment; the spa and thermal pool; Taste restaurant; the snow room; Dolce Gelato on the Waterfront



VIKING STAR



HIGHLIGHTS INCLUDE THE SERENE WINTERGARDEN, THE MAIN POOL WITH RETRACTABLE ROOF, A SNOW GROTTO AND THE AL FRESCO AQUAVIT TERRACE

Sleek, contemporary Scandinavian design and friendly, thoughtful service will define Viking Cruises' first ocean ship *Viking Star*. With capacity for just 930 passengers, the yacht-style ship will take guests to the world's most iconic ports, as well as more unusual destinations.

Panoramic windows in the Explorers' Lounge offer stunning views with its wraparound veranda, as well as the 360-degree promenade deck. Blonde wood, glass and white marble features in the three-deck atrium while luxury facilities include the serene Wintergarden, where the crew will serve an elegant afternoon tea.

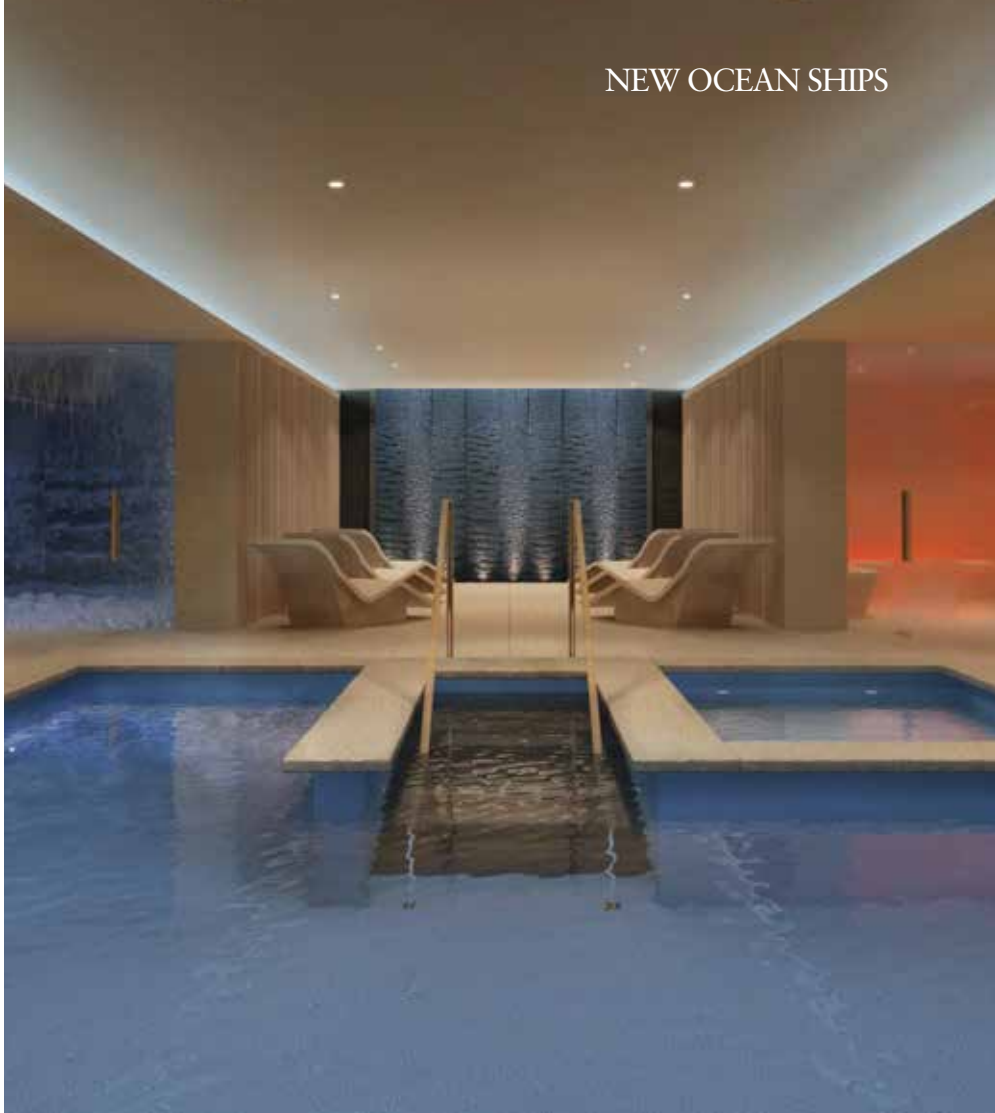
Five categories of staterooms, ranging from Veranda Staterooms to the Explorer Suites, include king-size beds, large showers, LCD televisions and private verandas.

For entertainment, live performances will take place in the Viking Piano Bar, or you can see a show in the ship's main theatre. Foodies can enjoy regional delights and healthy-eating options in The Restaurant, The Italian Grill and The Chef's Restaurant.

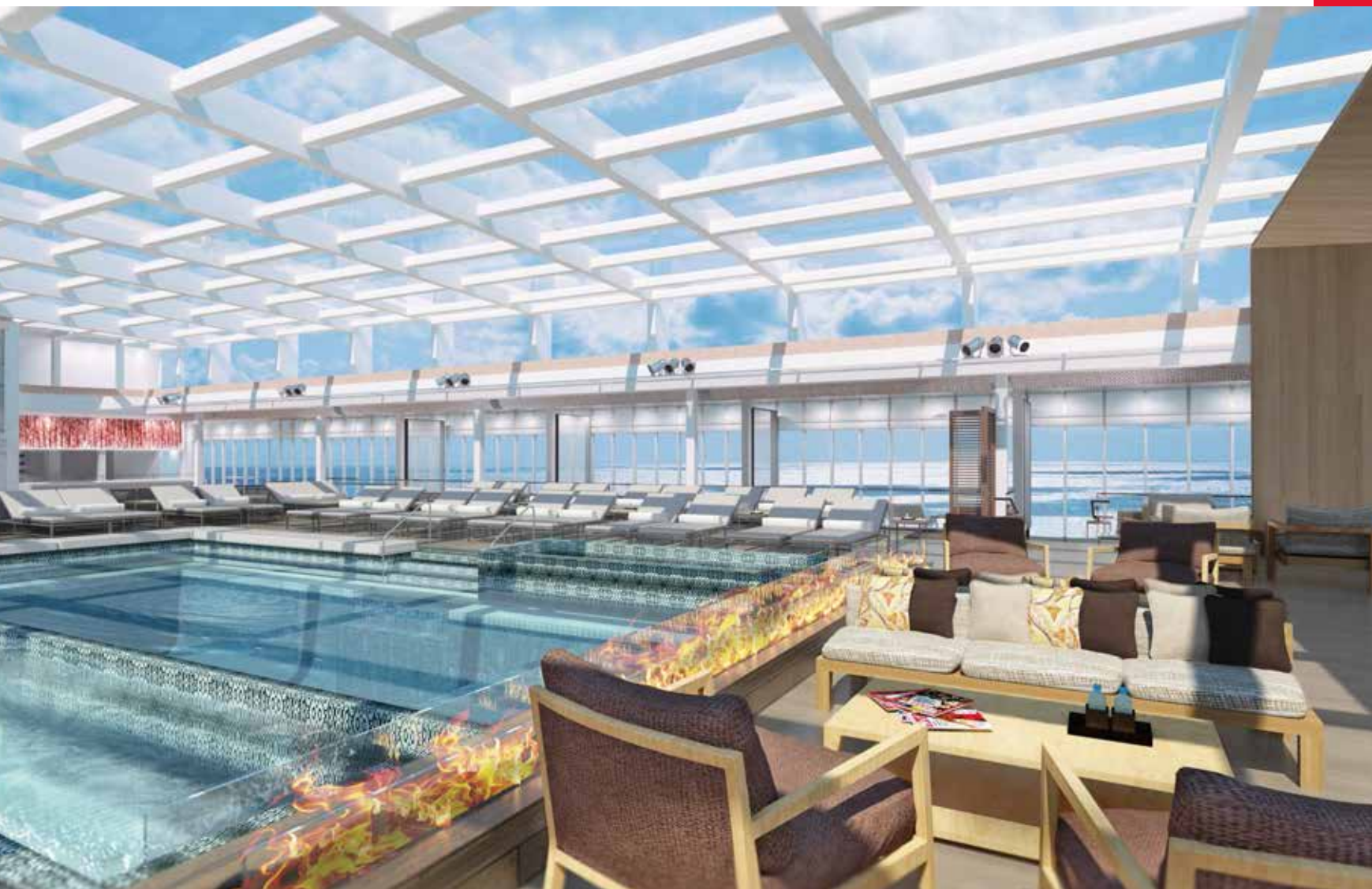
The Main Pool has a retractable roof and there's also a Sports Deck. At night, guests will be able to enjoy a film outdoors under the stars. *Viking Star* will also boast one of the few infinity pools at sea, and the al fresco Aquavit Terrace, already a firm favourite on Viking's river ships.

A must-try will be the Viking spa experience which draws on the holistic philosophy of Nordic culture. In the snow grotto snowflakes fall from the ceiling through chilled air and the traditional sauna will cleanse mind and body (vikingcruises.co.uk). ▶▶





Clockwise, from left:
The splendid three-deck atrium; the relaxing Wintergarden; the Lido; the Spa pool area will showcase the best of Nordic wellness



Top to bottom: Innovations on Viking Star include the retractable roof in the main pool; all staterooms on Viking Star feature king-size beds, private verandas and LCD televisions ▶▶



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COOL BRITANNIA



Sailing on its maiden voyage in March 2015, P&O's new ship *Britannia* draws on the company's 175-year heritage and is the biggest cruise ship ever built for the British market.

The 3,600-passenger ship features blue funnels and statement Union Flag livery, while the exquisite attention to detail continues in the ship's Starburst atrium, a chandelier-sculpture centrepiece.


Big hitters include The Cookery Club, headed up by celebrity chef James Martin, as well as Eric Lanlard's patisserie, located in the ship's three-storey atrium, along with a charcuterie and gelateria. Wine connoisseurs will head to The Glass House Grill with pairings by wine expert Olly Smith. Or enjoy a drink in the Crow's Nest bar featuring piano music and the atmospheric Blue Bar for sumptuous cocktails.

Boutique-style staterooms will offer soothing colours, bespoke British artwork and large flat-screen TVs for films on demand. All the outside rooms have balconies while bathrooms have glass shower screens and pamper packs from The White Company.

For entertainment, a multi-purpose TV studio doubles as a cinema and a venue for guest speakers, demonstrations, game shows and radio plays. For something a bit different, there's also the dining and live entertainment venue, the Limelight Club.

The Retreat, *Britannia*'s al fresco spa terrace, has cabanas for chilling out, while the buzzing Live Lounge hosts singers, tribute acts and live bands. And when the entertainment's over, the venue turns into a nightclub.

Fans of *Strictly Come Dancing* will love the glamorous Crystal Room with its wooden dance floors, chandeliers and intriguing dance memorabilia. Or why not work out in the gym, take a Spinning class or head to the dedicated sports space, Arena.

For relaxation and pampering, there's the Oasis Spa, where you'll be surrounded by luxurious dark wood and the aroma of scented oils, and can choose from a menu including Elemis treatments. *Britannia* promises a true home away from home (pocruises.com). 





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Clockwise, from above: The Starburst atrium is part chandelier, part sculpture; the state-of-the-art Studio will offer everything from game shows to musical performances; a Superior Deluxe stateroom; the Peninsular restaurant





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BIGGER AND BETTER

MSC Armonia emerged from dry dock in November after an extensive refurb, including lengthening. **Kate Sutton** joined its inaugural sailing from Genoa to the Canary Islands



Slicing a cruise ship in half, separating it and inserting a whole new mid section is a vast task, and that's exactly what MSC Cruises did with *MSC Armonia*, in just three months.

MSC's €200 million Renaissance Programme is an ambitious two-year operation to take four of its ships back to the Fincantieri shipyard in Palermo, Sicily, for the lengthening process. The ship is cut just in front of the funnel (slightly behind the mid-way point) and then separated so the new pre-built section of ship can be inserted. The hull is then resealed.

It's an enormous feat of engineering which has enabled MSC to not only modernise the much-loved *Armonia*, but also to add more balcony staterooms (94 in total) which of course, is great for cruise passengers. *MSC Sinfonia*, *MSC Opera* and *MSC Lirica* are all also getting the Renaissance upgrade this year.

I boarded the newly lengthened and refurbished *MSC Armonia* in Genoa for the inaugural sailing to the Canary Islands, and the first ►►



thing I spotted in my balcony stateroom, one of the new additions, was an extra bed attached to the wall for children – great for families. The pale wood added to the feeling of spaciousness and the bed was extremely large and comfortable.

After the obligatory call to the muster station for the life jacket drill, it was time for dinner and there are now several options on board. I chose to dine in the more formal Italian La Pergola restaurant, where the Californian Spring Rolls (with the hottest wasabi sauce I've ever tasted) and amazing Limoncello Cake with redcurrants were absolutely delicious. All washed down with a few glasses of house Prosecco.

Among the new onboard features and improvements are the kids' clubs. Had my 10-year-old son been with me, no doubt he would have headed off to the Junior Club (for seven to 12 year olds) for the rest of the evening and played on one of the many Xbox One consoles, but it's interesting to note that each club (and there are five, varying from ages 0-17), has dedicated staff who make sure that game time

ARMONIA'S COLOURS MIX DEEP REDS, CORALS, BLUES AND GREENS, WITH MARBLE AND GOLD TOUCHES

is shared equally and activities are varied. However, being child-free on this occasion, I took full advantage of being able to relax in the Red Bar, listening to a crooner who sounded like an Italian Chris Rea, while working my way through the cocktail menu.

The colour palette throughout the ship is a mixture of deep reds, corals, blues and greens, with luxury marble and gold touches in the bar and lounge areas. During the lengthening process and refit, the Atrium has remained light and airy, with a stunning waterfall feature on the back wall opposite the reception area, but new carpets have been laid, furniture reupholstered and ceilings painted, and the general ambience throughout the ship is one of calm. Cool, marbled walls, coupled with plush carpets, convey a sense that you are on board a really opulent ship and in fact, it is hard to even see where the new section starts and the old section ends – the merging appears seamless.

Later that night, we sailed onwards to Marseille. Unusually, the only indication we had that we were moving at all was when I returned to my stateroom to take in the sights on my balcony, only to find Genoa had disappeared.

A friend and I decided to make our own way to Marseille the next morning, instead of joining the organised excursion, and there were plenty of taxis waiting for us when we disembarked. We spent four hours wandering around the town, before giving in to the temptation of freshly baked churros at the local market.

We were back on board the ship in time for Gala night, and after some spectacular fireworks we went to the ship's theatre for the show *Cleopatra* (I'm not sure that contortionists and a man balancing another man on his head were in fashion in ancient times, but we thoroughly enjoyed the show). Surprisingly, the theatre is still the same size post-lengthening, and a show reservation system has been employed in high season to accommodate everyone.

We had another late night and even though I could have taken advantage of having breakfast delivered to my room the next day (at no extra charge on the Aurea package), I thought it best to get some fresh air. The following morning was a sea day as we were by now making our way to Cartagena, Spain, and this gave me the perfect opportunity to check out the spa.

The Aurea Spa is dedicated to treatments from Bali. I had high expectations. After all, MSC had recently won the coveted Best for Wellbeing Award at the Cruise International Awards 2014. And I





wasn't disappointed. I think I saw angels at one point during my Balinese massage when my masseur hit a particularly tough shoulder knot. There is also a well-equipped gym on board which I (thankfully) didn't have time to try out.

It seems such an enormous undertaking, to lengthen and refurbish a ship, and it's astonishing to think this took such a short time to complete. The fact that a new 24-metre section integrates so easily with the remainder of the ship illustrates just what a magnificent achievement this truly is.

My overall impression is that MSC Cruises thinks of itself as a family, dedicated to making all its passengers feel as welcome and comfortable as possible. From partnerships with Chicco and LEGO and the introduction of 'any time' dining, to providing an outdoor football pitch for tournaments and a Spray Park for younger guests, they seem to have thought of everything. 🌊

GETTING THERE

A seven-night *Canary Island* cruise on 14 March 2015 starts from £549pp, departing from Las Palmas, Gran Canaria, calling at Puerto del Rosario (Fuerteventura), Spain, Funchal, Portugal (overnight in port), La Palma, Spain, Tenerife, Spain and returning back to Las Palmas, based on two adults sharing (children cruise free with MSC Cruises all year round, only paying port taxes and flights). Includes meals, accommodation, theatre shows, use of gym/sports deck, kids' clubs and return British Airways flights from Heathrow to Las Palmas (msccruises.co.uk/02034263010).

Go online: To read a review of MSC's ship *Preziosa* sailing on the Adriatic calling at Istanbul on the Bosphorus, go to cruise-international.com/msc-preziosa-review/

Clockwise, from above: Enjoy 'any time' dining on MSC Armonia; the ship was cut in two at Fincantieri shipyard in Palermo, Sicily; the refurbished balcony staterooms feature extra beds for children

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TOP 50 CARIBBEAN CRUISES

With dozens of islands to choose from, it's no wonder that the Caribbean is the most popular cruise destination in the world – and there are some fantastic cruise-and-stay options for the year ahead, says **Deborah Stone**





MOUSE MAGIC

Meet Mickey Mouse and friends on *Disney Magic's* round-trip from Florida's Port Canaveral to duty-free shopping and beach paradise St Thomas plus Disney's private Bahamas island Castaway Cay.

Departs March seven for seven nights, from £1,142pp including flights (0800 408 6228/cruise.co.uk).

NATIONAL PARKS OF PANAMA

See Costa Rica's lush national parks, the old Dutch capital of Willemstad on Curaçao and unwind on Aruba's white sand beaches, plus transit the Panama Canal on board *Azamara Journey*.

Departs 9 March for 12 nights, from £2,743pp cruise only (0844 493 4016/azamaracruises.com).

CARIBBEAN TRANSATLANTIC

Visit one of the greatest collections of British naval buildings in the world at Antigua, where you can also snorkel and see hummingbirds on this great-value P&O cruise on *Azura* from Barbados. Departs 21 March for 13 nights from £849pp including flight to Barbados (0208 544 6612/iglucruise.com).

LAS VEGAS AND PUERTO RICO

Fly to Las Vegas and explore the city for two nights, then fly to Miami and embark on your cruise to the Caribbean and back, with highlights including colourful Puerto Rico, St Thomas and incredible snorkelling at St Maarten.

Departs 1 April for 11 nights from £1,799pp, on *Celebrity Reflection*, including internal flight only (0800 082 2186/jetlinecruise.com).

TAMPA ROUND-TRIP

Complete your Florida holiday with a breath of fresh sea air sailing from Tampa on board lively *Brilliance of the Seas* plus a day on Cozumel island for excellent water-based sports.

Departs 2 April for four nights, from £1,359pp including flights (01246 819819/bolsovercruiseclub.com).

FLORIDA AND THE PANAMA CANAL

There's a partial transit of the Panama Canal in this round-trip from Fort Lauderdale on *Coral Princess*, including Colón at the entrance to the canal.

Departs 1 April for 11 nights, from £1,203pp cruise only (0800 953 4966/cruises1st.co.uk).

JAMAICAN DISCOVERY

The private beach resort of Labadee is the gateway to Haiti on board *Freedom of the Seas* as this round-trip from Florida's Port Canaveral takes in Jamaica's colonial gems at Falmouth.

Departs 2 August for seven nights, from £639pp cruise only (0800 953 4966/cruises1st.co.uk).

WESTERN CARIBBEAN

Do Disney in Orlando for five days then leave Port Canaveral for a seven-night spin that takes in the former pirate island of Roatán and Mayan ruins at Mexico's Costa Maya.

Departs 20 April for 13 nights from £1,249pp including return flights, hotel stay and car hire (0208 544 6612/iglucruise.com).

CHRISTMAS IN THE SUNSHINE

Spend Christmas Day basking in the sun, sailing between colourful colonial Tortola and tropical Turks & Caicos in





the Bahamas on *Saga Sapphire*'s return trip from Southampton.

Departs Southampton on 7 December for 34 nights from £6,189pp (0800 505030/saga.co.uk/cruises).

BARBADOS

New two-week round-trips from MSC Cruises aimed at the UK market with 12 stops including Venezuela's diving hotspot Margarita Island and very French Martinique.

Departs Barbados regularly from 15 December for 14 nights, from £1,599pp including return flights and transfers (020 3426 3010/msccruises.co.uk).

CARIBBEAN & CENTRAL AMERICA

This one-off round-trip leaves Miami for buzzing Jamaica then heads over to Colombia's Cartagena, with its jewel box old town, before the white sand beaches of Mexico's Cozumel.

Departs Miami on 11 November for 10 nights, from £519pp cruise only or £1,119pp including flights (020 3426 3010/msccruises.co.uk).

MIAMI ROUND-TRIP

Sail from Miami and back on *MSC Divina* calling at Grand Cayman's George Town, with its Stingray City, and the US Virgin Islands' historic St Thomas.

Departs 28 November for 14 nights, from £1,389pp including flights (020 3426 3010/msccruises.co.uk).

CARIBBEAN FROM SCOTLAND

Fred. Olsen Cruise Line's first no-fly Caribbean round-trip from Scotland stops in Tenerife and the Azores as well

as nine totally tropical islands including relaxed St Barts.

Departs Greenock on 10 November for 32 nights from £2,672pp (0845 868 7198/fredolsencruises.com).

CUBAN & COLOMBIAN TOURS

Enjoy New Year's Eve in Barbados, an overnight stay in colourful Havana plus two nights in Jamaica's Montego Bay.

Departs Tenerife on 23 December for 43 nights, from £2,924pp cruise only and £3,574pp including flights (0845 868 7198/fredolsencruises.com).

VIRGIN ISLANDS CRUISE

Join *Norwegian Escape*'s Miami-based cruises round the British and US Virgin Islands when it launches in October.

Departs 20 November for nine nights, from £1,380pp including return flights (0845 201 8900/ncl.co.uk).

SOUTHERN CARIBBEAN

Volcanic St Kitts with its mountains and pink beaches is a highlight on this round-trip from New York on *Norwegian Getaway*, calling at Puerto Rico's gorgeous old town San Juan.

Departs 28 November for 14 nights from £1,622pp including return flights (0845 201 8900/ncl.co.uk).

PRIVATE GETAWAY

Private island Great Stirrup Cay gets you in the mood for Jamaica where you can visit Bob Marley's home before reaching Mexico's coral reef Cozumel resort on *Norwegian Getaway*.

Departs 19 December for nine nights from £2,086pp including return flights (0845 201 8900/ncl.co.uk).

GRAND ADVENTURE

Cross from New York to Southampton in style on Cunard's *Queen Mary 2* calling at sun-soaked islands and the Caribbean's newest destination: Dominican Republic's Amber Cove resort near historic Puerto Plata.

Departs 12 November for 21 nights, from £2,499pp including flights to New York (0843 374 0000/cunard.co.uk).

FESTIVE NEW YORK

Go shopping in New York then enjoy Christmas and see in the New Year cruising the Caribbean Sea on *Queen Mary 2*, including a drive to St Lucia's volcano crater and hot springs.

Departs 15 December for 19 nights, from £2,969pp including return flights from New York (0843 374 0000/cunard.co.uk).

Clockwise, from top left: Disney's cruises depart from Florida and offer your little ones the chance to meet some of their favourite characters; St John in the US Virgin Islands; Caribbean beach cabanas; catamaran moored in Barbados



PHOTOS: © CHEL BEESON/GETTY/ALAN COPSON/AWL IMAGES/ISTOCK/SHUTTERSTOCK/KEN WIEDEMANN SEAN PAVONE/ALAMY

TREASURE ISLANDS

A hotel stay in lively St Maarten then sailing to laid-back island, Anguilla, to enjoy waterfront bars and local reggae is just the start of the adventure on the three-masted tall ship *Star Clipper*.

Departs 27 November for nine nights, from £2,099pp including return flights (0208 544 6612/iglucruise.com).

TRANSATLANTIC CRUISE

Sail from Southampton on P&O Cruises' *Azura* on this transatlantic cruise via Ponta Delgada in the Azores, calling at five Caribbean islands including St Kitts, volcanic St Lucia and Barbados.

Departs 30 October for 15 nights from £1,019pp including flights to the UK (0208 544 6612/iglucruise.com).

SALVADOR TO MIAMI

Enjoy Hapag-Lloyd's ultra-luxurious *Europa 2* as you sail from Brazil up to five Caribbean islands including Tobago, where rainforest tours include waterfalls and swimming in natural pools.

Departs 1 March for 17 nights, from £6,410pp cruise only (0800 542 0858/hl-cruises.com).

ORLANDO AND WEST CARIBBEAN

After seven nights in Orlando, sail from Port Canaveral to snorkel or dive on the barrier reef at Belize and enjoy watersports at Cozumel and Costa Maya, Mexico.

Departs 4 April for 15 nights from £1,299pp, on *Carnival Sunshine*, including car hire and return flights (0800 082 2186/jetlinecruise.com).



TEXAS RANCH ADVENTURE AND JAMAICA

After four days of trail rides from a dude ranch near Austin, sail from Galveston to laid-back Jamaica's gorgeous beaches and discover Grand Cayman's reefs, wildlife and colonial history.

Departs 28 April for 13 nights, from £1,829pp, on Royal Caribbean's *Navigator of the Seas*, including car hire and full board at ranch, but no flights (0800 082 2186/jetlinecruise.com).

NEW YORK, MIAMI BEACH AND CARIBBEAN CRUISE

After three nights in New York take the train to Miami's South Beach for two nights before boarding *Norwegian Getaway* to visit the Virgin Islands and the Bahamas.

Departs 23 August for 14 nights from £1,689pp, on Norwegian Cruise Line's *Norwegian Getaway*, including hotels, full board rail fare and return flights (0800 082 2186/jetlinecruise.com).

WINDWARD ISLAND CRUISE

Acclimatise with three nights in a Barbados spa hotel then board tall ship *Royal Clipper* for a cruise that takes in unspoilt Dominica's hot springs and rainforest and St Kitts' stunning beaches as well as Antigua and Martinique.

Departs 11 March for 11 nights, from £1,999pp, including hotel stay and return flights (01293 831 932/virginholidayscruises.co.uk).

Above: A stunning waterfall in Trinidad, Cuba; **Left:** explore some of the region's coral reefs

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EXPLORE SPICE ESTATES AND DISTILLERIES ON THE DELIGHTFUL ISLAND OF GRENADA



Left: St George's, Grenada;
Below: St Lucia

SOUTHERN CARIBBEAN

Visit the old walled city of Puerto Rico's San Juan and the US Virgin Islands' excellent marine park as you cruise the Caribbean after three nights in a Barbados hotel.

Departs 20 September for 11 nights, from £1,322pp including hotel and return flights (01293 831 932/ virginholidayscruises.co.uk).

ORLANDO STAY AND CARIBBEAN CRUISE

Enjoy a week in Orlando before sailing from Florida's Port Canaveral on *Freedom of the Seas* calling at Royal Caribbean's private CocoCay eco-resort and shop in duty-free St Thomas.

Departs 10 December for 14 nights, from £1,199pp including hotel and return flights (01293 831 932/ virginholidayscruises.co.uk).

SAN FRANCISCO TO NEW YORK

Sail from California on Oceania Cruises' *Regatta*, enjoying beaches at Mexico's Cabo San Lucas and Huatulco, and Nicaragua, transiting the Panama Canal to the Caribbean and up to New York.

Departs 2 September for 18 days, from £2,919pp including return flights (0845 505 1920/oceaniacruises.com).



MIAMI TO MIAMI

Go diving off Grand Turk island, swimming with dolphins off the British Virgin Islands' Tortola and explore the coconut-covered mountains of Cayo Levantado in the Dominican Republic, on board Oceania Cruises' *Riviera*.

Departs 2 December for 10 days, from £2,049pp including return flights (0845 505 1920/oceaniacruises.com).

SAIL ROUND THE ISLANDS

Do you love golf, snorkelling or sea kayaking? You can do them all near Antigua's St John's, while Grenada has spice estates and distilleries to explore, among the highlights of this Oceania Cruises trip on *Regatta*.

Departs 11 April for 12 days, from £2,169pp including return flights (0845 505 1920/oceaniacruises.com).

WEST INDIES HIDEAWAY VOYAGE

Go zip-lining in the rainforest of volcanic Dominica, mountain hiking on Nevis and swim off Virgin Gorda's The Baths beach on this Azamara cruise on board *Azamara Journey*.

Departs 11 December for 12 nights, from £2,309pp cruise only (0844 493 4016/azamaracruises.com).

THANKSGIVING IN THE WEST INDIES

Explore protected parklands on the US Virgin Islands' St John, see plantation homes on Nevis and sail America's Cup yacht *Stars & Stripes* at St Maarten.

Departs 21 November for 10 nights, from £1,600pp cruise only (0844 493 4016/azamaracruises.com).

BEAUTIFUL BERMUDA

Visit the turtle sanctuary on tiny Bequia and colonial streets in Bermuda's St George in a round-trip from Barbados on all-inclusive *Silver Whisper*.

Departs 7 December for seven days, from £2,469pp cruise only, including excursions (020 7664 2214/theluxurycruisecompany.com).

MIAMI TO MIAMI

Nassau in the Bahamas has a huge waterpark while chic St Barts boasts Swedish colonial buildings on this all-inclusive *Seven Seas Navigator* cruise.

Departs 12 November for 10 nights, from £3,299pp including return flights, excursions and wifi (020 7664 2214/theluxurycruisecompany.com).

PARTYING IN JAMAICA

Relax on private island Princess Cays, before partying in Jamaica and heading for the coral beaches of Grand Cayman.

Departs 15 November for seven nights, from £549pp cruise only (0843 374 2401/princess.com/go).

SOUTHERN CARIBBEAN MEDLEY

Go shopping or diving in Aruba, see wild flamingoes on Bonaire and eat like a king on spice island Grenada on a round-trip from Fort Lauderdale.

Departs 20 November for 10 nights, from £749pp cruise only (0843 374 2401/princess.com/go).

EASTERN CARIBBEAN VOYAGER

Check out at least one of the 365 beaches in Antigua, home to historic Nelson's Dockyard, as you enjoy *Royal Princess's* trip to the Bahamas.

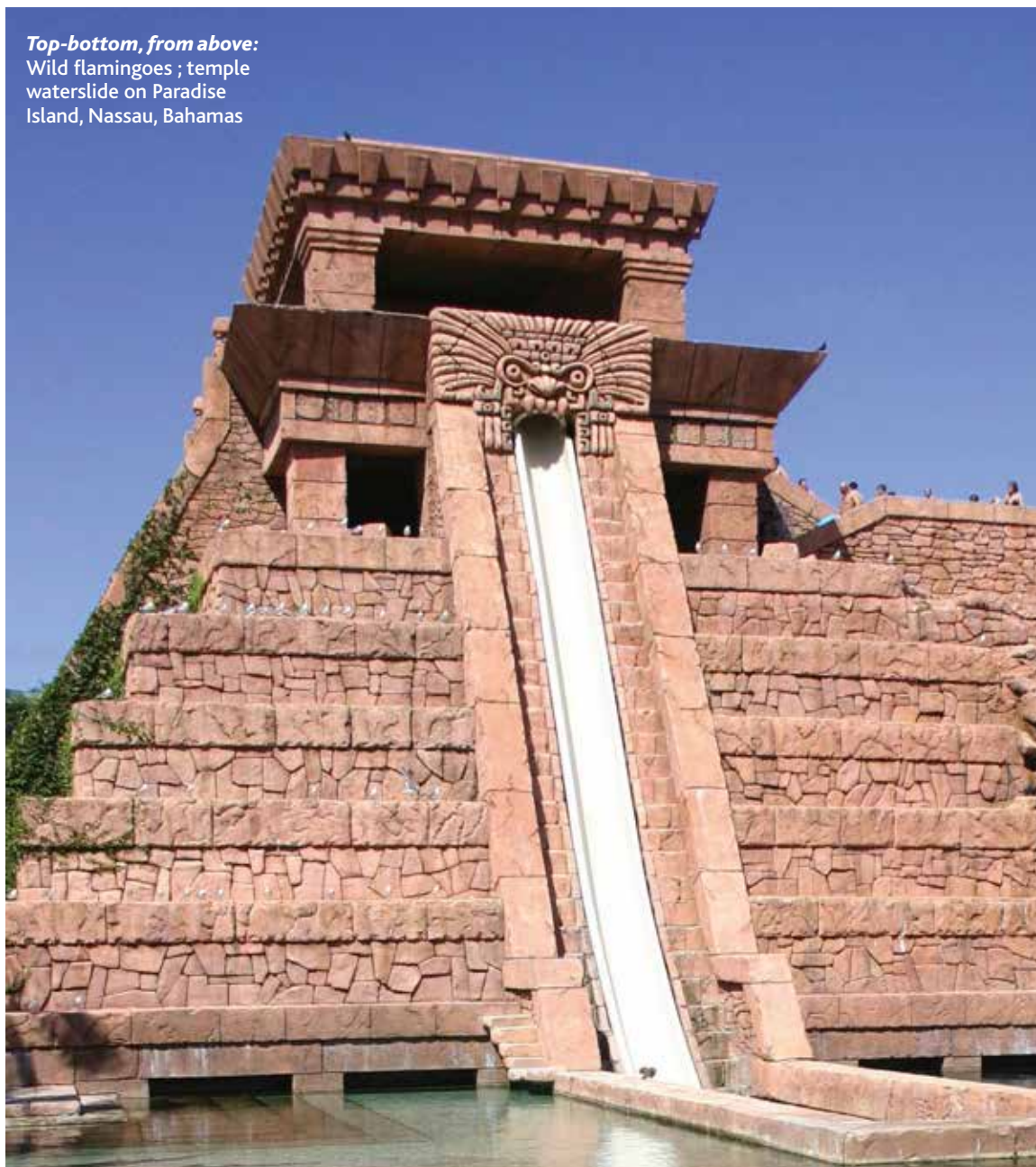
Departs November for 10 nights, from £799pp cruise only (0843 374 2401/princess.com/go).

CUBAN FUSION

Leave Jamaica on *Thomson Dream* for Mexico's Playa del Carmen. Spend two days in Havana, Cuba, with its UNESCO-listed architecture and fabulous music, before returning to Jamaica. ►►



Top-bottom, from above:
Wild flamingoes ; temple
waterslide on Paradise
Island, Nassau, Bahamas





SNORKEL AMONG CORAL REEFS OR SWIM
WITH DOLPHINS IN THE BAHAMAS



Departs 29 December for seven nights,
from £1,288pp including return flights
(0871 230 2800/thomson.co.uk/cruise).

CARIBBEAN COCKTAIL

Board *Thomson Celebration* for a
round-trip from Barbados to see
Georgian architecture at Tobago, swim
at Annadale Falls in Grenada's rainforest
and visit Bequia's Turtle Sanctuary.

Departs 22 November for seven
nights, from £892pp with return flights
(0871 230 2800/thomson.co.uk/cruise).

PRIDE OF PANAMA

Sail from Jamaica on *Thomson Dream*
to Colombia's ancient walled town of
Cartagena, Panama's Colón, near the
famous canal, and eco-tourist paradise
Puerto Limón, Costa Rica.

Departs 31 March for seven nights,
from £1,309pp including return flights
(0871 230 2800/thomson.co.uk/cruise).

LAID-BACK FLORIDA

Sail on *Carnival Dream* from New
Orleans to Florida's laid-back Key West,
heading for the Bahamas where you can
canoe in Freeport's national park and
swim with dolphins at Nassau.

Departs regularly from 5 April for
seven days, from £417pp cruise only
(0843 374 2272/carnival.co.uk).

CORAL REEFS

Snorkel among coral reefs around
Grand Turk, see cigars hand-rolled in



MIAMI ROUND-TRIP

Round off or start a land-based holiday, sailing from Miami and back on *Norwegian Sky* to the Bahamas and the beaches of Nassau and Great Stirrup Cay.

Departs 31 August for four nights, from £269pp cruise only (0800 408 6228/cruise.co.uk).

SAN JUAN & COSTA RICA

Experience a cruise on *Adventure of the Seas* from Costa Rica's historic San Juan and back, calling at Danish-influenced St Croix in the US Virgin Islands.

Departs 5 September for seven nights, from £517pp cruise only (0800 408 6228/cruise.co.uk).

NEW ORLEANS AND MEXICO

Another great holiday add-on, leaving New Orleans on board *Carnival Elation*

for Mexico's Cozumel and Progreso. This is the access point for the mesmerising Mayan pyramids and the colonial town of Merida.

Departs 28 November for five nights, from £202pp cruise only (01246 819819/bolsovercruiseclub.com).

NEW YORK TO SAN JUAN

Board *Celebrity Summit* in New York for a cruise to St Maarten and the British Virgin Island of Tortola before reaching San Juan, Costa Rica. Departs 18 October for six nights, from £360pp cruise only (01246 819 819/bolsovercruiseclub.com).

Go online: For more ideas for your perfect Caribbean cruise go to cruise-international.com

Dominican Republic's La Romana and take a trolley train tour of Curaçao's historic streets on *Carnival Conquest*.

Departs regularly from 18 April for eight days, from £436pp cruise only (0843 374 2272/carnival.co.uk).

MAYAN TREASURES

See soul legend Smokey Robinson performing live on board *Carnival Ecstasy* on a round-trip from Miami calling at Florida's Key West then two full days at Cozumel's beach resorts and Mayan ruins.

Departs 20 April for four days, from £220pp cruise only (0843 374 2272/carnival.co.uk).

CHIC CARIBBEAN

P&O Cruises' new ship *Britannia* is half the attraction on this cruise of popular destinations including chic St Martin on the French Antilles and calls at the volcanic Windward islands.

Departs 4 December for 14 nights from £1,339pp including flights (0800 953 4966/cruises1st.co.uk).

CAPE LIBERTY

Fly to New York for a five-night sunshine cruise on *Liberty of the Seas* to dock at Bermuda's King's Wharf where you can swim, snorkel, play golf or shop in the duty-free malls.

Departs June 13 for five nights, from £721pp including flights (0800 408 6228/cruise.co.uk).

Clockwise, from this image: Several Caribbean cruises embark from Miami; the stunning coast of Jamaica; swimming with dolphins





THE WOW FACTOR

Broadcaster **Katy Hill** and family set off on their first cruise on board Royal Caribbean's Allure of the Seas – and are instantly impressed...

Me in the Caribbean (below);
Kaya found the FlowRider
hugely entertaining (right)



There's a quote on my gym bag by the Danish author Isak Dinesen (of *Out of Africa* fame): "The cure for anything is saltwater – sweat, tears or the sea." It's resonated with me for a while and given that I've always found the sea cathartic, I couldn't think of a better way to launch into 2015 than on board our first family cruise.

This wasn't my first foray into uncharted waters as my husband Trey and I went on a cruise to French Polynesia when I was pregnant with our daughter Kaya, now eight. I was intrigued to see how our experience then would compare to cruising with Kaya and her brother Akira, five, in tow.

Pulling into Fort Lauderdale the kids' jaws hit the floor when they saw our ship, Royal Caribbean's *Allure of the Seas* for the first time. Kaya thought it was a building and we couldn't believe how it seemed to dwarf everything around it. The check-in queues moved with impressive speed given that 6,000 people were boarding and before we knew it we walked into the impressive Boardwalk with its high, cavernous ceilings, vintage car, fountains and moving bar. Kids. Minds. Blown.

At first it felt a bit as though everyone but us seemed to know what was going on, but as soon as we found our way to deck seven and Stateroom 264, calm was restored. The kids headed excitedly out onto our balcony and marvelled at the view while I unpacked our bags, which had already arrived. One of the bonuses was that the kids' bed was actually a sofa by day; and we were taken care of by the fabulous attendant Inengah Suartana. Also, ocean view balcony plus kids in the clubs means bye bye tan lines. Just saying.

The Zip Line was a massive hit with all of us, particularly Kaya

FAMILY FUN & FITNESS

We quickly discovered there is a LOT of fun to be had on board *Allure of the Seas*, which for us kicked off with the Sailing Party. It's a pretty special feeling leaving Fort Lauderdale with the sun setting, seeing the smiles on your kids' faces as they watch King Julien, Gloria and the Dreamworks gang do their thing. Then, something I never thought I'd experience: ice-skating on a ship, which we did, several times. The ship's slight movement added extra zest to the family experience. The FlowRider was also a huge hit. Heading there straight after breakfast soon became our favourite morning activity – we loved watching everyone trying to surf, with the occasional wipe-out. Kaya found it all hugely entertaining. ▶▶



Me with Akira (left); Trey (above) was a total natural when it came to surfing on the FlowRider



Kaya and Akira (top left); the view from Allure of the Seas will take your breath away (left)



We'd then watch Daddy who, in typical picks-things-up-quickly fashion was soon in the advanced group.

If you've ever wanted to hang from a cable nine decks up and zoom through the air at high speed you're in luck. The Zip Line was loads of fun, although I won't pretend stepping off the edge didn't take a bit of nerve. Kaya was totally fearless and did it 20 consecutive times, even inspiring nervous adults to have a go. Other sea days were packed with Crazy Golf, swimming in the five pools, cruising around on the carousel, hanging out in the Adventure Zone Kids Club (where parents can drop kids for free), watching puppet shows and doing Science Workshops. No wonder we slept so well at night.

DINING ON BOARD

With all your activities and food included, a cruise is crazy value for money. There were over 20 restaurants and cafés so you could, if you wanted to, eat from the minute you woke up, to the minute you went to sleep. And the quality of food is amazing, even before you consider they're serving up 100,000 meals a day and everything is made fresh on board.

For a family, the dining possibilities were a dream as you could find something for all tastes at all times of day. We had the My Time Dining option in the main restaurant, Adagio, where we had the flexibility to eat at a time of our choosing, or just rock up whenever. Of the speciality restaurants on board, Rita's Mexican Cantina on the Promenade served up the best snapper I've ever had, anywhere in the world. Giovanni's Table in Central Park (yes, a park on a ship) was a great option for al fresco, Tuscan-themed evening dining which brought back memories of our wedding

SHORE DAYS

A cruise isn't just about the ship, it's also about the destinations. All our excursions were well managed and the crew were very efficient at getting passengers on and off. Here are some snapshots of what we did:

Nassau, Bahamas: The Blue Lagoon was a perfect excursion choice for the day: chilling by the aqua blue waters, searching for shells, sipping fresh coconut which the kids watched being prepared, amazed at the huge machete. It was the perfect 'white sand/no shoes' beach day. We loved every second.

St Thomas, Caribbean: We visited Magens Bay, regularly voted one of the world's top 10 beaches. While we weren't the only ones there we spent a lovely afternoon enjoying the beach life and sipping piña coladas. Rude not to.

St Maarten, Caribbean: This was our longest and favourite stop as you could walk everywhere. We spent the day on the beach, listening to a steel drum band and the lapping waves. The kids loved watching some school kids having their swimming lesson in the sea and a walk around the town ended the perfect shore day.



Kaya makes a new friend during some free time on shore



Akira and Kaya spent hours happily playing on the beach and searching for seashells



stars, as did the various evening fountain shows to music. The Blue Planet show was a highlight for all of us and the underwater scene was one of the most stunning things I've ever seen on a stage. *Chicago*, jazz shows, casino – there really was everything you needed if you wanted to party the night away, or you could hit the sack exhausted and content at 9pm like we did.

THE CREW

You can't talk about *Allure* without mentioning the phenomenal crew, the good feeling clearly filtering down from the adored Captain Johnny Faevelen. We loved watching his antics on our TV, although we didn't get to see him riding one of his two Harley-Davidson's on board (no, I'm not joking). The wonderful Mauricio, Lori, Ben and Alvaro on the Zip Line couldn't have been more amazing with Kaya; Badoo looked after us in Adagio and Luis greeted everyone with a wonderful smile in Windjammer. And finally special mention to the amazing Nengay, the hardest working and happiest person on board, who kept our room looking stunning and delighted the kids every night with a new towel art sculpture.

So yes, cruising is a wonderful option for families. I could go on. And on. There were lots of extended families on board because all ages can have fun on a ship and you know where everyone is. And *Allure* is in Europe this summer. What are you waiting for? 🍷

in Tuscany 10 years ago. After dinner, Trey and I had some quality time enjoying the band, while the kids ran around outdoors, exploring.

We generally had breakfasts in The Windjammer restaurant with its wonderful buffet and stunning ocean views then throughout the day, the numerous dining options were tested and, given that there were self-serve ice cream machines poolside, the kids were in heaven. We generally sat near the balcony edge so the kids could look down on the musicians and be entertained.

ENTERTAINMENT

Wow. Just. Wow. What WASN'T on offer on *Allure* is possibly more the question. The breathtaking Aqua Show in an outdoor amphitheatre at the back of the boat made for a spectacular family evening under the

GETTING THERE

A seven-night *Western Mediterranean* cruise on *Allure of the Seas* departs 2 August 2015 from £6,120 for a family of four. Includes 'Select drinks' package (soda for kids) and gratuities (royalcaribbean.co.uk/0844 493 4005).

Go online: To read a review of Royal Caribbean's Quantum of the Seas go to cruise-international.com/quantum-of-the-seas-review



A QUANTUM LEAP FORWARD

Royal Caribbean's newest and most groundbreaking ship yet — *Quantum of the Seas*SM — made its inaugural voyage from Southampton in October, and for the lucky families who were chosen from hundreds of applicants to be ambassadors for the brand last year, it was an experience unlike any they'd had before.

DRINKS
..... AND ONBOARD
SPENDING
MONEY
..... ON US!

'It exceeded our expectations,' agreed the whole Walker family — Julie, Steve, and kids Sam (17), Emma (16) and Lucy (11). 'The whole layout was different compared to the other ships. Something new at every turn — we can't believe how much was on offer, whilst still giving it a spacious, luxurious feel.' Sam definitely agreed, citing his favourite feature as the panoramic venue, Two70SM. 'It's not often that you see something that you've just never seen before,' he said. 'There is a more relaxed feel about the venue, and you feel part of the show as the dancers and musicians seem to be all around you. Although we already knew about the Robot Screens, seeing them move for real was out of this world!'

For mum and dad, having so much onboard to entertain the kids really added to their own holiday experience. 'It's nice to have the odd meal, just the two of us, and [the kids] can go off and do their own thing!' said Dad, Steve, and with a selection of 18 dining venues onboard, they had no trouble finding something to whet their appetite.

'The steak in the Grande was amazing, and Steve tried sushi for the first time ever and loved it!' said Julie. 'There's so much choice, you could eat somewhere different every night of your holiday.' And it wasn't just the food that impressed the family. 'The Bionic Bar [the first fully robotic bar anywhere in the world] was mesmerising!' agreed mum and dad. 'Ordering drinks became a totally unique experience.'

The Farmers — Mum Liz, Dad Graham, Josie (18), Sam (15) and Eddie (10) — also loved their time onboard *Quantum of the Seas*SM. 'The ship offers so much for a

family,' said Liz, 'and it was every inch the technological marvel it was billed as. From on-shore hand-held tablet check-in, to full-size touch-screens to show you the way to your room...the future had just arrived!' Dad, Graham, enjoyed the two-day preview so much that he was keen to get back onboard for a full-length holiday. 'Next time we're cruising I would definitely seek out *Quantum of the Seas*SM, because there's just so much on it and it's so different from every other ship.'

So, how would the Walker family describe *Quantum of the Seas*SM in three words? 'Innovative,



exciting and unique.' And the Farmers? 'A breakthrough, a marvel, a high-octane thrill ride!' It seems that three words just aren't enough.

You can experience all that this incredible new ship has to offer for yourself when sister ship *Anthem of the Seas*SM begins sailing from Southampton in April 2015, bringing all these amazing features right to your doorstep. And when you book by 28 February, you'll even get drinks and up to \$400 onboard spending money included in the price. For more information and to book, go to royalcaribbean.co.uk/anthemoftheseas. ■



TOTAL GUIDE TO FAMILY CRUISES

Top tips and expert advice for taking children of all ages on their first holiday at sea





Cruise holidays are perfect for families, including multi-generational groups; not only can you take your kids to some of the world's most exciting destinations, but with all the accommodation, food and entertainment included, they are incredibly good value, too.

"Depending on which cruise line you choose, there's a dizzying array of onboard activities to satisfy even the hardest-to-please kids, ranging from water parks and adventure playgrounds to ice-skating, tenpin bowling, climbing walls and bumper cars, while all family-friendly ships have free kids' clubs that give parents an opportunity to spend time alone together," says Liz Jarvis, Editor of *Cruise International*.

Modern ships have flexible mealtimes, a choice of restaurants and enough choice to please even the fussiest eaters.

On sea days many ships have games for all the family to join in with and there is usually supervised evening entertainment for all ages too, from toddlers to teenagers.

And that's before you've even left the ship. There is a massive choice of itineraries, from beach-based Caribbean adventures to marvelling at Alaska's awesome glaciers; from the great outdoors of Norway to the Baltic capitals of culture; and from fun in the sun in the Mediterranean and Adriatic to exploring Europe's greatest cities.

Here's our total guide to help you have your perfect family cruise holiday.

WORDS: DEBORAH STONE

EQUIPMENT

High chairs are available in all restaurants on all family-friendly cruise lines, with most also offering baby baths and sterilisers, but you should request these when you make your booking because sometimes they are available on a first-come, first-served basis.

MSC Cruises provides Chicco baby backpacks, bottle warmers and buggies that are all available to borrow, so you don't have to pack them yourself, although they recommend taking your own infant cot. »



ACCOMMODATION

Suites are seen as the ideal family accommodation, but most cruise lines have more affordable staterooms or cabins with two bunk bed-type berths that pull down from the wall, or sofa beds.

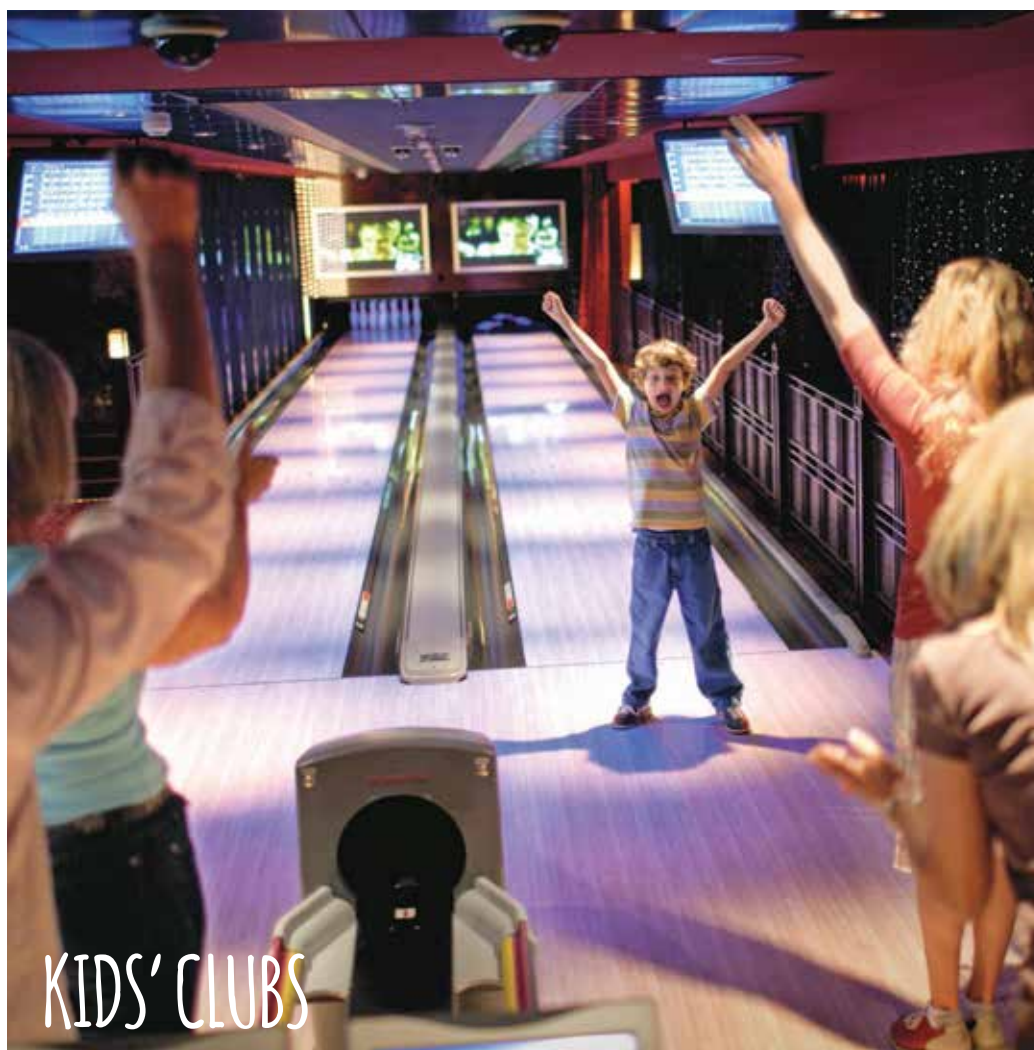
Most cruise lines won't let children share a room without an adult, even teenagers, but many ships have inter-connecting cabins and Norwegian Cruise Line's ships have spacious Family Villas in their luxurious Haven section.

MSC Cruises has three and four-berth cabins and offers free cruises for children under two who share a cabin with two adults, although fares may be applicable.

Children aged two to 17 will be charged child fares starting from £149 cruise only and £449 for a fly-cruise on a typical seven-night Mediterranean cruise. This is cheaper than prices usually charged for third or fourth berths in cabins.

P&O Cruises also has children's fares, when sharing with two adults, but flights, transfers and port taxes have to be paid.

Royal Caribbean International's new *Anthem of the Seas* has modular rooms that are called Family Connected Junior Suites. These connect via a vestibule to provide both separate bedrooms and bathrooms.



KIDS' CLUBS

All cruise lines catering for families have free children's clubs, usually for children aged two or three to 17, although activities for younger children are available with parent participation. Paid-for baby-sitting or night nurseries can often be arranged at night.

Royal Caribbean International has a Royal Babies programme (6-18 months but parents must attend), Royal Tots (18-36 months, with parents) and three Adventure Ocean age groups up to 11 including educational activities such as Certified Jr Adventure Scientists. There are also Tween and Teen groups and paid-for baby-sitting in a group setting or parents' cabin, for children at least 12 months old.

MSC Cruises has free clubs for children: Baby (under-3s, although children under 1 must be accompanied by an adult), Mini (3-6 years), Junior (7-11 years), Young (12-14 years) and Teen (15-17 years). It will have the first LEGO-themed playrooms at sea on refitted *MSC Armonia* and two new ships launching

in 2017. It is also developing children-only areas with Chicco, the Italian baby care brand.

P&O Cruises' new ship *Britannia* has a teenagers-only outdoor space as well as an indoor hangout with video game zones. Children aged 13 to 17 are one of four age groups it caters for, starting from Splashers (2-4 years).

Britannia has P&O Cruises' most advanced Night Nursery facility, but this is also available on the line's other family ships from 6pm until 2am. Latest check-in is 11pm and the service is free, with parents given a pager in case children wake up.

Disabled children are welcomed to join in kids' clubs activities, but if they need one-to-one care a parent or carer must be with them.

"All of our 24 ships have dedicated facilities and spaces for kids... We're constantly looking to introduce new spaces on our ships such as the recent introduction of the Bookville, our Dr Seuss reading corner," says Erin Johnson, Marketing Director of Carnival Cruise Lines.



FOOD

Buffets are perfect for fussy eaters, while many cruise lines offer complimentary room service which hungry teens can order themselves. You can get vegetable purees and certain baby food brands on most ships if you ask your head waiter in advance, and there are usually children's menus for the main dining room, plus pizza, hot dogs and ice creams available near the pools.

Fun Time Dinners are for kids only on MSC Cruises' ships, eating with the children's entertainment team. Or they can eat with their family during Happy Dinners time, then go back to the kids' club. There is also a kids corner in buffet restaurants.

An early children's tea is available every night on P&O's family ships *Aurora*, *Azura*, *Oceana*, *Ventura* and *Britannia* so that parents can eat alone if they prefer. Sausages, fish fingers and pizza are on the menu along with healthy options such as pasta with vegetables, soup and fruit. Parents are expected to supervise.

The Dynamic Dining concept has revolutionised family mealtimes on board Royal Caribbean International's new *Quantum* class ships. *Quantum of the Seas* and *Anthem of the Seas* have no set dining times or formal nights. Of *Quantum's* 18 dining options, five are complimentary restaurants with speciality restaurants including Jamie's Italian by Jamie Oliver.

Carnival offers a 'Green Eggs and Ham Breakfast', for a small charge, where kids can meet Dr Seuss characters and enjoy pancakes, French toast and more.



**ALL OF OUR 24 SHIPS HAVE DEDICATED
FACILITIES AND SPACES FOR KIDS -
WE'RE ALWAYS LOOKING TO INTRODUCE MORE**

Erin Johnson, Carnival Cruise Lines



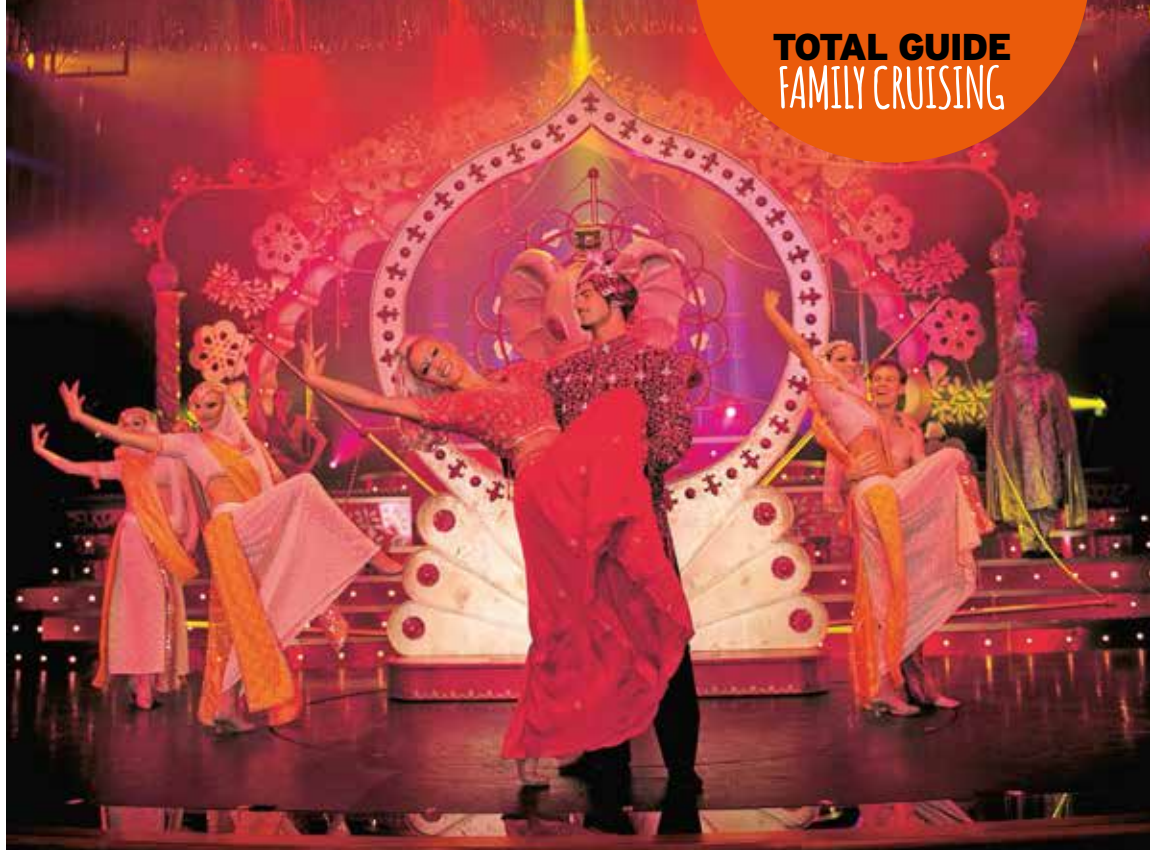
CONVENIENCE

A cruise is an ideal holiday for families who want to explore a variety of destinations, without the hassle of re-packing and travelling in between.

"This year we have three ships sailing round-trip from Southampton and Dover to destinations including the Mediterranean and Scandinavia, making getting away even easier," says Paul Ludlow, Managing Director UK & Ireland, Princess Cruises.

A cruise from the UK is a stress-free holiday option for families. There are no luggage restrictions if you arrive in your own car (paid-for secure parking is available) and you don't have the strain of airport security followed by cruise terminal boarding in a foreign country.

Royal Caribbean International's *Anthem of the Seas* makes its maiden voyage in April and will be based in Southampton, making it easy to get to for a week enjoying its sky-diving simulator, bumper cars, roller skating and North Star capsule which whisks you 300ft above the sea.



FAMILIES CAN TAKE PART IN ANY
NUMBER OF ACTIVITIES ON BOARD

NORWEGIAN CRUISE LINE'S SHIPS

Graham Sadler, Norwegian Cruise Line



ENTERTAINMENT

As well as the non-stop range of daytime activities, evening entertainment for families on most cruise ships ranges from West End-style musicals to magic shows and new-release films. Although night clubs and lounge bars may not be suitable for children, there is usually evening entertainment organised by the kids' clubs that older children will enjoy.

Princess Cruises has Movies Under The Stars, a huge screen beside the main pool showing blockbuster movies with complimentary popcorn, warm cookies and milk at evening shows and fleecy blankets for late screenings.

Norwegian Cruise Line's entertainment team presents the musical *Legally Blonde* on *Norwegian Getaway* and Cirque Dreams Jungle Fantasy on *Norwegian Breakaway* – both excellent family viewing.

"Families can take part in any number of activities on board our ships, with tenpin bowling, rock climbing, a ropes course and sports facilities," says Norwegian Cruise Line's Graham Sadler.

"At Royal Caribbean we know how precious together time is for families,

which is why we strive to offer them an amazing holiday experience," says Stuart Leven, MD UK & Ireland, Royal Caribbean. "From climbing the Rockwall and surfing the waves of the FlowRider, to enjoying a fun, delicious meal at Johnny Rockets, there's something for everyone at every age"

Free 30-minute Cookery Club Kids Classes during school holidays are part of the children's activities on P&O Cruises' new ship *Britannia*, a foodie heaven with restaurants and cafés inspired by some of Britain's leading chefs. All but the youngest children (2-4 years) can sign up for free lessons in the fabulous Cookery Club room, where there will also be paid-for family classes for over-8s and parents.

DreamWorks characters Shrek and Fiona, plus the penguins from Madagascar, are on board Royal Caribbean's *Quantum of the Seas* at exclusive shows and character meals.

The Dr Seuss-themed activities on Carnival Cruise Lines' ships include Seuss-A-Palooza, a free Dr Seuss character-led story time and parade, the Dr Seuss Bookville wacky library plus arts and crafts activities. ►►



WORDS: DEBORAH STONE

EXCURSIONS

Although many children enjoy seeing places they have learned about at school; for instance Pompeii near Naples, The Colosseum in Rome and the Acropolis in Athens, museum fatigue can set in if you drag them round too many cultural sites. That's why most cruise lines also have beach transfers and activity-based excursions. And even if an excursion seems like a must, if it involves hours in a coach, you are unlikely to enjoy it much yourself.

Visit Turkey's Adaland Aquapark, one of the largest in Europe, on P&O Cruises' itineraries that call at Kuşadası, or explore Oceanografic Marine Park if your Western Mediterranean cruise takes you to Valencia. P&O also offers dolphin and whale watching on some cruises, as well as family city tours.

Royal Caribbean International's family excursions include Dog Sled Summer Camp in Alaska, swimming with turtles in the Caribbean and visiting the Tivoli Gardens and theme park in Copenhagen.

"There are also lots of opportunities for families to do things together on our cruises, with special family-friendly shore excursions, great public areas on board, pools and sports facilities to enable families to enjoy their time on holiday together, as well as apart," says Giles Hawke, Executive Director, MSC Cruises.

Princess Cruises will be offering plenty of shore options through its partnership with the Discovery Channel.

"We are pleased to be working with the Discovery Channel to offer exciting family activities, both on board and on shore, including a range of Discovery Recommended shore excursions and experiences: Stargazing at Sea, Shark Week and the Princess Culinary Academy," says Paul Ludlow, Princess Cruises.

Many shore excursions are designed specifically with families in mind, including kayaking, jeep safaris and fantastic water parks.

"A cruise holiday really does tick all the boxes for a great family adventure," says Andy Harmer, Director of the Cruise Lines Association UK & Ireland.

Some cruise lines will arrange group baby-sitting or supervised children's entertainment on port days. For instance, adults on Norwegian Cruise Line ships can leave potty-trained toddlers and older children on Splash Academy and Entourage programmes while they go sightseeing.

Under-threes are often exempt from excursion charges if they don't take up a tour seat, and children's rates may be available up to the age of 12 or 13.

Carnival Cruise Lines has excursions just for teenagers, which are planned on board by the Club 02 leaders once they know the numbers.

Princess has its own Caribbean island, Princess Cays, where children can use a supervised play area, Pelican Perch, while their parents enjoy the beach and sports facilities.





THIS YEAR PRINCESS IS
PLEASED TO BE WORKING WITH
THE DISCOVERY CHANNEL TO
OFFER EXCITING FAMILY CRUISES

Paul Ludlow, Princess Cruises



SAFETY

If you sign your kids into children's clubs then you can be completely assured that once you have dropped them off they will be looked after by experienced staff. Even if older children sometimes wander around the ship without adult supervision there are metal or safety glass barriers on every open deck so that they won't fall overboard. That's also true of stateroom balconies, but if you are really worried you can always book an inside cabin.

All cruise ships have medical staff, but one thing to bear in mind is that you have to pay for their services unless it is for seasickness.

"Of course we always have the safety of our guests in mind especially children, emphasised by the announcement of our new onboard paediatric telemedicine

service in July. We are the first cruise line to offer this service, which allows the onboard medical team to consult directly with specialist paediatricians at any time to offer second opinions or specific diagnoses," says Giles Hawke, Executive Director of MSC Cruises.

As part of its safety programme, P&O Cruises is trialling identity wristbands for its under-12 passengers so they can be taken to their rooms if they get separated from their parents.

Carnival Cruise Lines is also giving its guests piece of mind by offering a walkie-talkie rental service for families to keep in touch.

"Customer safety is our No.1 priority," says Carnival's Erin Johnson. "It's important everyone on board feels safe and relaxed throughout their holiday." ►►





YOU TIME

For mums and dads who want to enjoy some quality time together, P&O Cruises has age-specific children's clubs and entertainment both day and night at The Reef.

"Parents can enjoy a lazy afternoon in the spa or a quiet evening together," says Christopher Edgington, Marketing Director of P&O Cruises.

Carnival also emphasises the importance of giving parents a break from the little ones from time to time. "We have dedicated adult-only areas," says Erin Johnson at Carnival. "The Serenity areas only permit guests over 21, allowing adults that relaxing down time. We've also got spas where parents can relax in one of the treatment rooms." 🛀

ESSENTIALS

✳ Always read your cruise line's Before You Go advice as soon as you have booked, in case you have to apply for a visa from the London embassies of countries on your itinerary.

✳ If you are a first-time cruiser you are probably going to Europe or the Caribbean, where Brits don't need visas but most cruise lines will require you to have a passport valid for at least six months after your return date.

✳ Although cruise ships are cashless, you will need money for ports of call. Apart from dollars and euros, ships rarely carry local currencies and although most European countries accept euros you will pay over the odds for souvenirs unless you have local currency.

✳ At the end of the cruise you will have to pay for bar drinks, usually with additional service charges, as well as compulsory gratuities (about £10pp per day), even for children over three.

✳ Other extra fares include spa treatments and thermal pools, photographs, some sports, laundry services, speciality restaurants and some room service meals. Stateroom key cards are swiped to pay for services, but you can have a limit put on children's cards.

✳ Visas for most countries on itineraries are organised by the cruise lines, but there may be exceptions so check with your travel agent or cruise line when you book. To see which countries require visas visit visacentral.co.uk.

✳ Vaccinations are rarely needed for destinations such as the Caribbean or North America, but to check up-to-date travel information visit nathnac.org at least six weeks before you travel.

✳ Some cruise lines will not allow babies under six months on board, while some may not allow babies in nappies in the pools. Finally, don't forget you'll all need travel insurance.

Go online: to see the Top 10 family cruises go to cruise-international.com/top-10-family-cruises



COUNTDOWN TO BRITANNIA

BRITANNIA PORTUGAL, SPAIN & MADEIRA 2 MAY 15 - 14 NTS - B506

DATE	DESTINATION
May 2015	
Sat 2	Southampton, UK
Tue 5	Lisbon, Portugal
Wed 6	Seville (Cadiz), Spain
Fri 8	Lanzarote, Canary Islands
Sat 9	Gran Canaria, Canary Islands
Sun 10	Santa Cruz, Tenerife
Mon 11	Madeira, Portugal
Thu 14	La Coruna, Spain
Sat 16	Southampton, UK

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DOUBLE ON BOARD CREDIT

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BRITANNIA SCANDINAVIA, RUSSIA & ESTONIA 30 MAY 15 - 14 NTS - B509

DATE	DESTINATION
May 2015	
Sat 30	Southampton, UK
June 2015	
Mon 1	Kristiansand, Norway
Tue 2	Oslo, Norway
Wed 3	Copenhagen, Denmark
Fri 5	Stockholm, Sweden
Sat 6	Tallinn, Estonia
Sun 7	St Petersburg, Russia
Mon 8	St Petersburg, Russia
Tue 9	Helsinki, Finland
Fri 12	Bruges (Zeebrugge), Belgium
Sat 13	Southampton, UK

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DOUBLE ON BOARD CREDIT

Balcony (obs) **£1999^{PP}** Deluxe Balcony **£2849^{PP}** Suite **£3549^{PP}**



BRITANNIA BRITISH ISLES 6 JUL 15 - 12 NTS - B513

DATE	DESTINATION
July 2015	
Mon 6	Southampton, UK
Tue 7	Sail By Flamborough Head, UK
Tue 7	Sail By South Shields, UK
Wed 8	South Queensferry, Scotland
Thu 9	Invergordon, Scotland, UK
Fri 10	Kirkwall, Scotland
Sat 11	Sail By Cape Wrath, Scotland
Sun 12	Greenock, Scotland
Mon 13	Liverpool, UK
Tue 14	Dublin (Tours From Dun Laoghaire), Ireland
Wed 15	Cork, Ireland
Thu 16	Sail By South Cornwall, UK
Fri 17	Guernsey, UK
Sat 18	Southampton

CRUISE CLUB SELECT PRICE
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£1369^{PP} **UP TO £500**
DOUBLE ON BOARD CREDIT

Balcony (obs) **£1779^{PP}** Balcony **£1799^{PP}** Suite **£3349^{PP}**



BRITANNIA SPAIN, ITALY & CORSICA 9 OCT 15 - 14 NTS - B523

DATE	DESTINATION
Oct 2015	
Fri 9	Southampton, UK
Tue 13	Valencia, Spain
Wed 14	Barcelona, Spain
Thu 15	Cannes, France
Fri 16	Rome/Civitavecchia, Italy
Sat 17	Ajaccio, Corsica
Mon 19	Alicante, Spain
Tue 20	Gibraltar, UK
Fri 23	Southampton, UK

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Meadowhall Shopping Centre, Upper Arcade near Customer Services

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Here comes the FUN

Rosie Shelley and her daughter Hannah board Carnival Freedom
in the Caribbean for their first cruise experience





ur catamaran powered its way along the Mexican coastline, the spray from the water a welcome relief in the heat, and in the distance a small island, lined with row upon row of lush green palm trees, began to emerge. As we drew nearer I spotted the line of hammocks in the water, the sun loungers on the beach and the white sands; and I seriously contemplated a permanent move to this gorgeous private island.

To add to the excitement our guide, Alejandro, mentioned the supervised children's play area with trampolines, basketball, games and crafts that meant my 11-year-old daughter Hannah would also be occupied should we decide to make Passion Island our home forever.

Except that five days into our very first cruise Hannah had settled into life on board *Carnival Freedom*. She'd become so used to our daily games of mini golf, basketball and ping-pong, plus the pools and the arcade games, that I doubted she'd want to spend much time away from the ship she had started calling our 'cruise home'.

Travelling as a mother-daughter duo, we took a six-day trip around the Western Caribbean, leaving from Fort Lauderdale and calling at ports in Jamaica, the Cayman Islands and Mexico. My concerns that there wouldn't be enough on board to keep my internet-obsessed child occupied were completely unfounded. As well as the sports activities there was Camp Ocean, the superbly run kids' club, where she made friends, played video games and board games, which meant I could relax a little.

On the day we first set sail Hannah wrote in her diary that "there are happy faces everywhere", which perfectly sums up the atmosphere on board from the moment we arrived to the sound of live carnival music and guests dancing in the lobby, to the moment we stepped off the ship at the end of our adventure.

Carnival Freedom quickly became our home away from home. Our balcony stateroom was spacious and



immaculately maintained by our room steward Basuki, his fabulous towel art creations a definite highlight of each day.

The balcony was the main attraction; the perfect spot to sit in and relax at the end of the day, when it's so dark you can't see where the sky ends and the sea begins and all you hear is the sound of the ocean. It was also the ideal place to watch the ship arriving into a new part of the world each morning.

Arriving into our first port of call, Falmouth, Jamaica, we stood together on the balcony, mesmerised by the whole experience, as Hannah noted down the colours of the Jamaican flag to report back to her friends at school.

From the port we took a short 15-minute drive to Good Hope Estate, a former sugar plantation in the hills above Falmouth, on the edge of the Martha Brae River. Set in more than 2,000 acres of lush Jamaican countryside and located 600m above sea level, it offers a welcoming breeze which helps take the edge off the heat and humidity that hits you the moment you arrive.

The attraction of this excursion was the variety of activities available, from dune buggy riding and river tubing to visiting the tropical birds in the aviary and relaxing by the pool. You can even take a thrilling zip wire ride through the rainforest, which I almost did until I heard the screams of others flying overhead and thought better of it.

Hannah enjoyed the children's play area complete with swings, slide and

mini challenge course, and we were both impressed with the guided tour of the Great House with its original orange cedar floorboards, rare mahogany furniture and unique grave room (which really is a grave inside a house). Built in 1755 it is steeped in history, all explained to us by our guide as we travelled round, and it offers stunning views over the whole plantation.

Also not to be missed is the opportunity to take a horse and carriage ride around the plantation where you'll visit an ancient factory and water wheel while learning more about the history of the estate. The highlight for Hannah was that one of the horses, Duke, appeared in *Pirates of the Caribbean*, which meant she could tell all her friends that she had stroked a celebrity. ►►

Clockwise, from left: Signpost in Georgetown, Grand Cayman, Cayman Islands; fresh coconuts; Carnival's waterworks; scuba diving is one of the area's most popular activities; the Mexican themed Blue Iguana tequila bar; Rosie's daughter Hannah enjoys a game with her friends, shaded from the sun





For others the attraction of Jamaica is the opportunity to swim with dolphins, and many of our fellow guests chose more water-based excursions. We saved the sea and sand for our next port of call, Grand Cayman in the Cayman Islands, and it didn't disappoint.

Our destination was the Caribbean paradise of Tiki Beach, part of Seven Mile beach. The sand, the colour of pale vanilla, sinks between your feet and the sea is so clear you can see the seabed. We stood knee-deep in water, watching tiny multi-coloured tropical fish swimming around our feet. Hannah later announced she'd caught her first fish and drew a small crowd as she showed off her catch in her red bucket. I was grateful our fellow travellers reacted with so much enthusiasm given the fish was only the size of a thumbnail.

The area is perfect for water sports, and for an extra \$10 to \$180 you can hire a kayak, try parasailing or go scuba diving – popular with the teenagers in our party. You can also hire snorkelling equipment by the hour although the on-site shop here also sells various

water sports gear with prices starting at around \$5.

On the bus back to the ship we became caught up in a tropical storm. As the staff on board welcomed us back with a warm towel for each guest, it really did feel like coming home and I knew I'd miss them and the ship at the end of our stay. They were exceptional and their infectious enthusiasm added to the positive, happy vibe on board.

Evenings were spent enjoying the onboard entertainment and in the various restaurants. You're spoilt for choice when it comes to food and I'm sure there's an unwritten rule that you have to taste it all.

We loved the complimentary Chic restaurant, perfect for us because it had a comprehensive children's menu. Hannah worked her way through it during the cruise, while I did the same with the dessert menu, because they're all calorie-free when you're at sea – I read that somewhere. I can recommend the warm chocolate melting middle with vanilla ice cream. From the main courses, the Indian vegetarian with fresh vegetables, lentils and basmati rice is simply delicious.

For a \$35 cover charge you can dine in speciality restaurant the Sun King Steakhouse. It offers steak and seafood dishes and an extensive wine list with amazing staff. It's perfect for a quiet, romantic evening, with seating overlooking the ocean. I had the broiled rosemary-infused chicken served on pan seared potato and mushroom mash, but make sure you leave room for the divine cheesecake with hazelnut biscuit.

At night, we were regulars at the Victoriana theatre where an eight-strong dance team delivered slick, energetic performances each evening to the packed auditorium. Despite a lot of the music dating back to the 1980s, before Hannah's time, she loved the shows and on the last day, this slightly shy girl even joined the dancers on stage for a conga.

Our final port of call was Cozumel, Mexico, and that glorious private island (reached by catamaran) where I could see myself living happily on a diet of coconuts and sea air. While I relaxed on the beach, Hannah spent the afternoon painting, playing basketball and marbles. This is the child who claimed she couldn't live without the internet.

Returning to *Carnival Freedom* for the last time it struck me that the variety of excursions available at each port, together with the onboard activities, dining options and entertainment, means you can shape your cruise how you want it. For Hannah there was even more: the chance to visit several countries in a short space of time without endless car journeys, to experience new cultures, to make friends and to grow in confidence.

As a family new to cruising, we're now totally hooked. I can't see us wanting to choose any other type of holiday for many years to come. Already we're plotting how we can travel the globe and experience the world, one cruise holiday at a time. 🌴

GETTING THERE

A six-night cruise on Carnival Conquest departing 25 October 2015, sailing from Fort Lauderdale, Florida and calling at Ocho Rios (Jamaica), Grand Cayman and Cozumel, Mexico starts from £389pp, cruise only. For more information or bookings go to carnival.com

Go online: To watch a video of the Carnival cruise experience go to cruise-international.com/carnival-cruise-review

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CULTURAL CRUISES

CRUISES FOR *Culture vultures*

Want to discover more about the destinations you're visiting and enjoy unique cultural experiences? These ocean cruise lines all offer impressive enrichment programmes



Azamara Club Cruises

Azamara Club Cruises pioneered the destination immersion concept, spending longer in port, including overnight stays, so you can really get to know a place. Its AzAmazing Evenings offer unique cultural experiences, ranging from private performances by the popular Lindo Folklore Ensemble in Dubrovnik to the three tenors singing Italian opera in Livorno. On board, there are seminars, lively talks and classes, as well as insider tips on lesser-known shore excursions. Feel free to grill Azamara's onboard experts with any burning questions or spark discussions you're dying to have, and add to your knowledge through its historical and cultural lectures.

Azamara even has its own sommelier for wine tastings, and offers culinary demos and computer classes in Excel, PowerPoint and Photoshop for any aspiring tech geeks.

On Azamara's *Grand Canal to the Acropolis* voyage, the Nights and Cool Places experience will be an evening of painting and sculpture at the sleek and

modern AK Art Foundation Grecian gallery. Admire the artwork of native painter Christophoros Asimis and sculptor and jeweller Eleni Kalatinou, as well as learning more about the island's artistic heritage.

The Insider Access Traditional Kotor Culinary Experience is also an exciting feature for 2015, entailing a walk through the beautiful Old Town of Kotor, a stop at a local market to buy produce, then a cookery demonstration in the home of local folk hero, Vlasta Mandic, known for her Montenegrin capella group, and a delicious meal to round off the day.

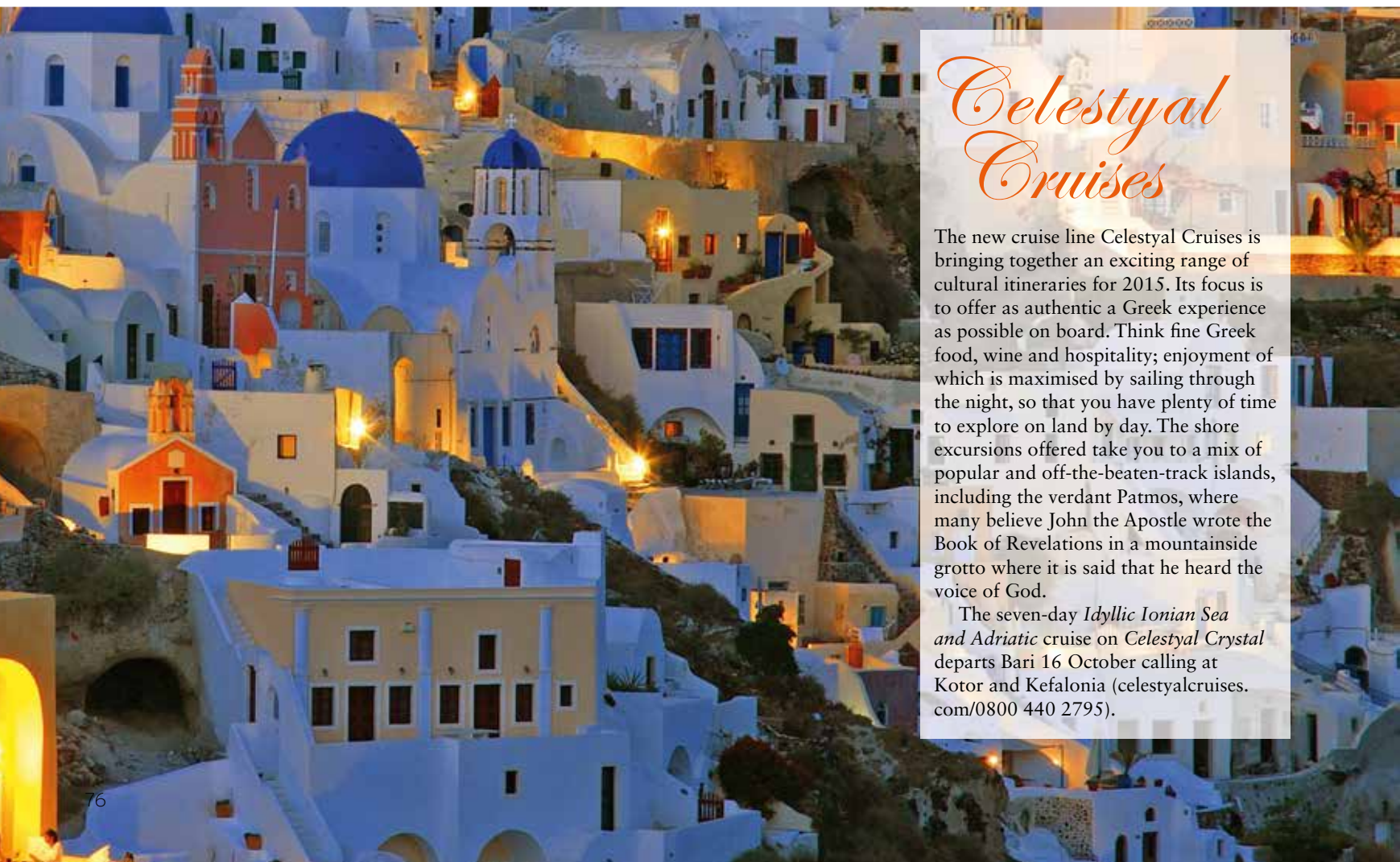
Azamara Club Cruises has a 10-night *Grand Canal to the Acropolis* voyage on *Azamara Journey*, sailing 10 September from Venice, from £3,438pp. You'll be able to savour six late or overnight stays in plenty of culture-rich destinations; discover Diocletian's Palace in Split, the marble streets of Dubrovnik, and there's also an optional visit to ancient Mycenae or Corinth (azamarclubcruises.co.uk/ 0844 493 4016).



Celestyal Cruises

The new cruise line Celestyal Cruises is bringing together an exciting range of cultural itineraries for 2015. Its focus is to offer as authentic a Greek experience as possible on board. Think fine Greek food, wine and hospitality; enjoyment of which is maximised by sailing through the night, so that you have plenty of time to explore on land by day. The shore excursions offered take you to a mix of popular and off-the-beaten-track islands, including the verdant Patmos, where many believe John the Apostle wrote the Book of Revelations in a mountainside grotto where it is said that he heard the voice of God.

The seven-day *Idyllic Ionian Sea and Adriatic* cruise on *Celestyal Crystal* departs Bari 16 October calling at Kotor and Kefalonia (celestyalcruises.com/0800 440 2795).



Saga



Saga's traditional, elegant cruises also offer an impressive cultural holiday experience.

Setting sail on 5 April from

Southampton, *Saga Sapphire* will welcome New Zealand opera singer Dame Kiri Te Kanawa, who will be on board as the ship sails to the site of the Battle of Gallipoli for the 100th anniversary of Anzac Day, and attend a commemorative service

to honour the fallen. In addition to visiting Gallipoli and the Greek island of Lemnos – muster point for the landings – the cruise will also include a performance from the Dame herself.

Saga's *From Galicia to Greece* cruise on board *Saga Sapphire* departs Southampton on 5 April 2015, for 31 nights from £5,384pp. Fare includes all meals on board, 24-hour room service, gratuities, entertainment and activities, welcome cocktail party and Captain's dinner, cancellation rights, port taxes, visas and UK mainland transfers (saga.co.uk/0800 096 0079).

Cunard



Celebrating its 175th birthday this year, Cunard continues its extensive Enrichment Programmes with more Book Clubs,

iStudy classes and its acclaimed Cunard Insights, a series of regular talks on contemporary issues and academia from high-calibre celebrities and experts. For the big 175, a year of special onboard features is planned, with a series of events and guest speakers consisting of statesmen, historians, actresses, poets, and even a Formula One hero.

Hollywood actress Kim Novak (above), star of Hitchcock's *The Birds*, Sir Max Hastings and David Blunkett are among those sharing their stories with Cunard passengers this year.

Cunard's *Canaries and Madeira* cruise on *Queen Victoria* departs Southampton on 10 May 2015, for 12 nights from £1,219pp. Former politician Ann Widdecombe DSG will appear on board as the cruise visits Lanzarote, Gran Canaria, Madeira and more (cunard.co.uk/0843 374 2224). ▶▶



Voyages to Antiquity

Voyages to Antiquity prides itself on its destination-rich itineraries exploring the world's ancient lands. Travelling on its beautiful boutique-style ship, *Aegean Odyssey*, you can choose from itineraries exploring the historical, cultural and natural wonders of the Mediterranean, Africa, India and Southeast Asia. You are also treated to an onboard lecture programme tailored to each trip, allowing you to read up on the places you visit before arrival.

Guest lectures from acclaimed journalist Martin Bell, Professor Robin Cormack of the Courtauld Institute of Art and ancient historian Dr Laurence Carter.

Voyages to Antiquity's *The Holy City of Byzantium* cruise on *Aegean Odyssey* departs Istanbul on the 4 August 2015, for 16 days from £2,545pp, visiting UNESCO heritage sites including St Mark's Basilica, Venice. Price includes hotels, lectures, excursions, wine with dinner, flights and transfers (voyagestoantiquity.com/0845 437 9737).



Oceania Cruises

Oceania Cruises' strong point is its culinary offer, and both its *Riviera* and *Marina* ships feature state-of-the-art cookery facilities and hands-on classes, plus demos, lectures and indulgent meals. Through its Culinary Discovery Tours programme, it also runs foodie tours on shore, taking guests to local artisan cheese-makers, chocolatiers, fishmongers and more.

Top French chef, author and TV celebrity, Jacques Pépin, will be stepping on board luxury ship *Riviera* in July 2015. As Oceania's executive culinary director Pépin will be overseeing specially designed signature menus, signing books, and giving lectures and demos (oceaniacruises.com/0845 505 1920).

Go online: For more of the best cultural cruises available in 2015 visit **cruise-international.com**



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SUMMER ESCAPES



QUEEN ELIZABETH VENICE & THE ADRIATIC 27 MAY 15 - 17 NTS - Q508

DATE	DESTINATION
May 2015	
Mon 27	Southampton, UK
Thu 30	Cadiz, Spain
June 2015	
Sat 2	Messina, Italy
Sun 3	Kerkyra, Corfu
Mon 4	Dubrovnik, Croatia
Tue 5	Venice, Italy
Wed 6	Korcula, Croatia
Sun 10	Gibraltar, UK
Wed 13	Southampton, UK

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Outside (obs) **£2019^{PP}** Balcony **£2729^{PP}**



QUEEN VICTORIA SPAIN & ITALY 28 MAY 15 - 9 NTS - V513

DATE	DESTINATION
May 2015	
Thu 28	Southampton, UK
Sun 31	Gibraltar, UK
June 2015	
Mon 1	Valencia, Spain
Tue 2	Barcelona, Spain
Wed 3	Monte Carlo, Monaco
Thu 4	Rapallo, Italy
Fri 5	Florence/Pisa (Livorno), Italy
Sat 6	Rome/Civitavecchia, Italy

CRUISE CLUB SELECT PRICE Inside fares from

£1239^{PP}

Outside (obs) **£1299^{PP}** Balcony (obs) **£1399^{PP}** PR Grill **£1999^{PP}**



QUEEN ELIZABETH SPAIN & ITALY 16 JUN 15 - 14 NTS - Q510

DATE	DESTINATION
June 2015	
Sat 16	Southampton, UK
Tue 19	Gibraltar, UK
Thu 21	Cagliari, Italy
Fri 22	Naples, Italy
Sat 23	Rome/Civitavecchia, Italy
Sun 24	Monte Carlo, Monaco
Mon 25	Barcelona, Spain
Wed 27	Cadiz, Spain
Sat 30	Southampton, UK

CRUISE CLUB SELECT PRICE Inside fares from

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QUEEN VICTORIA GREECE AND ITALY 27 JUN 15 - 7 NTS - V515C* 5 SEP 15 - 7 NTS - V520C

DATE	DESTINATION
June 2015	
Sat 27	Athens/Piraeus, Greece
Sun 28	Athens/Piraeus, Greece
Mon 29	Bodrum, Turkey
Tue 30	Santorini, Greek Isle, Greece
July 2015	
Wed 1	Olympia (Katakolon), Greece
Fri 3	Naples, Italy
Sat 4	Rome/Civitavecchia, Italy

*Fares based on V515C

CRUISE CLUB SELECT PRICE Inside fares from

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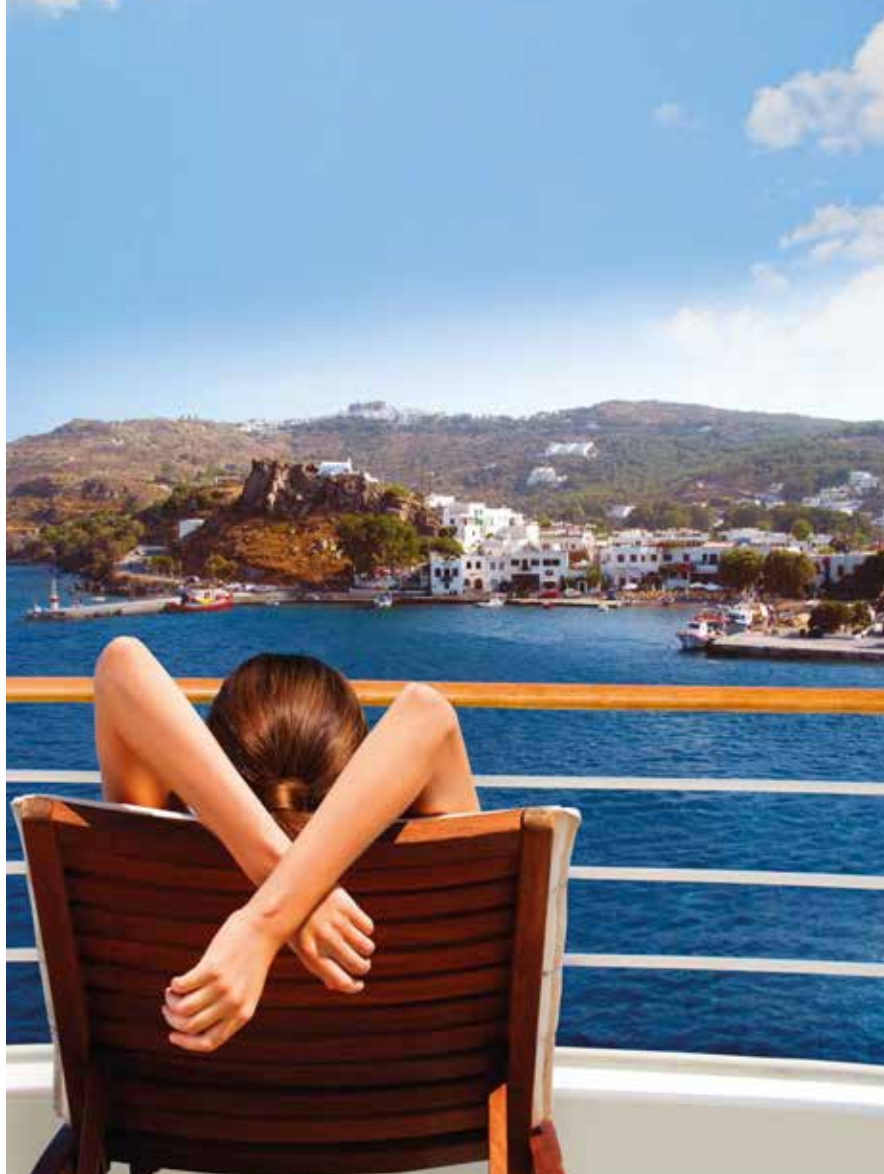
Meadowhall Shopping Centre, Upper Arcade near Customer Services

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AN AEGEAN *Dream*

Greece specialists Celestyal Cruises offer an authentic holiday experience, showcasing the very best the region has to offer





With its abundance of cultural treasures, phenomenal food and turquoise sea, Greece's appeal as a holiday destination is obvious. And now there's a cruise line that will give you an authentic local experience.

Celestyal Cruises is the only Greek cruise line operating in Greece and its surrounding waters. Meaning 'of the stars', 'heavenly' and 'divine', the name Celestyal indicates the company's commitment to creating the Aegean holiday of a lifetime. And it's all possible in the space of a convenient short break, as the cruise itineraries pack in an unforgettable adventure in just a few days.

With a deep knowledge of the region, its harbours and coastline, Celestyal uses mid-sized vessels, all designed to reach unspoiled destinations that other cruise ships can't (as well as the well-known hotspots, of course). *Celestyal Crystal*, *Celestyal Olympia* and the line's new ship, *Celestyal Odyssey*, are all ideal for cruising the glittering Greek waters.

Celestyal also prides itself on its local expertise, able to maximise passengers' enjoyment and provide relaxed, fantastic value holidays. Of their many destinations, the gorgeous Greek islands, with their instantly recognisable white-washed buildings, are a real highlight. Spot them from miles away as you approach spectacular Santorini, relax in the glorious sunshine on the beaches of Mykonos, stroll along the harbour at Ios or sail to the Turkish coast with a range of three, four and seven-night itineraries.

Then there's the hospitality. Guests can look forward to impeccable, personalised customer service both on board and on shore. Celestyal Cruises is proudly and passionately Greek-owned and managed, so you can expect a uniquely Greek approach based on stunning destinations, entertainment, culture, heritage, and of course gastronomy.

Staying true to its aim to deliver a quintessentially Greek holiday on all fronts, all itineraries feature delicious speciality Greek cuisine – world-renowned for its fresh ingredients and irresistible flavour combinations.

When it comes to entertainment, Celestyal's programme of over 80 themed and traditional events promises to cater to guests with a range of tastes, including culinary delights created by an award-winning chef. Educating passengers on all things Greek, from music and dance to food and history, a cruise with Celestyal is a veritable celebration of the region's rich culture and heritage.

If you want to experience an authentic cruise in an idyllic setting that combines first-class hospitality with fantastic value for money, Celestyal Cruises is the cruise line that will make it happen. 🌅



Go online: visit celestyalcruises.com, email info@celestyalcruises.gr or call Cosmos on 0800 440 2795 or +302104583499 for reservations

Win

a Mediterranean cruise for two

You and a guest could be sailing around the Med on MSC Fantasia



Cruise International has teamed up with MSC Cruises to offer one lucky reader and a guest the chance to sail away on a seven-night Mediterranean cruise holiday this September.

One of MSC Cruises' largest and newest ships, *MSC Fantasia*, departs Barcelona on 4 September 2015 to call at seven ports in seven nights on the new western Mediterranean itinerary to include Valletta, Malta.

In one week, you could be visiting seven spectacular Mediterranean destinations, waking daily to an unspoiled view of a new port.

Departing from Barcelona, discover cities that have shaped the history of the Mediterranean Basin, including the fascinating sites of Pompeii and Carthage, and the stunning cities of Portofino and Valletta.

MSC Fantasia will depart Barcelona and call at Marseille, France; Genoa, Naples and Messina in Italy before crossing towards Valletta, in Malta. From there, the ship will head to La Goulette (Tunis), in Tunisia before returning to Barcelona.

As part of your prize you will receive the Fantastica Experience, offering you a Balcony Stateroom so that you can make the most of your cruise holiday. You will receive breakfast in your stateroom, free room service throughout the trip and 50 per cent off fitness classes.

To truly relax, visit the MSC Aurea Spa. Voted 'Best for Wellbeing' in the 2014 Cruise International Awards, the MSC Aurea Spa is a haven of tranquillity. Over 20 types of massage, 19 body treatments and facials and a range of manicures, pedicures and beauty treatments are on offer in the Balinese spa. The dedicated spa doctor can advise the best treatments for you personally and the vitamin juice bar provides a refreshing and healthy cocktail after your pampering session. There is also the adult-only Top 18 Sun Deck available for the ultimate relaxation where dedicated waiters will bring you fresh fruit and drinks as you soak up the sun.

For those wanting to maintain their fitness regimes, the state-of-the-art gym and fitness facilities are located next to the MSC Aurea Spa. Fully-qualified instructors offer a programme of classes including spinning, Pilates, yoga and aerobics while the onboard personal trainer can put you through your paces one-to-one.

Each ship has its own theatre, casino, library, internet café, duty free shops and swimming pools with a rich programme of music and activities, tailored to each itinerary and related to the destination.

MSC's Mediterranean roots are reflected in the dining options available on board. Fresh pasta, award-winning pizza and bread are handmade on board every day, and there are dedicated menus catering for special diets including gluten-free, halal and vegetarian. All food served is inspired by the itinerary of the cruise and can be enjoyed in the informal setting of the buffet or the fine dining atmosphere of the restaurant. Speciality

restaurants serving a range of different foods from Tex-Mex to sushi can also be found on board most ships, along with traditional Neapolitan pizzerias.

MSC Cruises offers Mediterranean itineraries all-year round and seasonal sailings in Northern Europe, the Canary Islands and Morocco, the Caribbean, South America and the UAE. To find out more about MSC Cruises, call 0203 426 3010 or visit msccruises.co.uk

WHAT'S INCLUDED IN THE PRIZE

- Seven nights' full-board accommodation for two, sharing a Balcony Stateroom on board *MSC Fantasia*
- The cruise includes the Fantastica Experience, which includes all meals, entertainment, room service, breakfast in your room, priority choice of dinner sitting and 50 per cent discount on fitness classes such as yoga
- The sailing date (subject to availability at the time of booking), is 4 September 2015. 🚢



HIGHLIGHTS

- sail on *MSC Fantasia*
- visit many of the iconic Mediterranean ports of call
- Balcony Stateroom



WIN A MEDITERRANEAN CRUISE

Competition entry form

How to enter: For your chance to win a fabulous holiday with MSC Cruises, simply answer the following question, then complete and send this form to the address below. All entries must be received by 11.59pm on 20 March 2015.

Which city on the Mediterranean itinerary is the capital of Malta?

- ☐ A: Valletta
☐ B: Portofino
☐ C: Genoa

Name: _____

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Telephone: _____

Email: _____

Send your coupon to: MSC Cruises Competition, Cruise International, The Chelsea Magazine Company, Jubilee House, 2 Jubilee Place, London SW3 3TQ, UK

By entering the competition, you agree and acknowledge that The Chelsea Magazine Company and MSC Cruises are permitted to receive your registration data. Please tick if you subscribe to *CRUISE INTERNATIONAL* magazine ☐ Please tick if you do NOT wish to receive information about products and services from The Chelsea Magazine Company or MSC Cruises by phone, post or email ☐ Terms & Conditions apply (see box left).

Or enter online at: cruise-international.com/win-a-Mediterranean-cruise

TERMS AND CONDITIONS 1. The prize is for two adults sharing and is a 7-night cruise in the Mediterranean including full-board accommodation. The departure date is subject to availability. 2. The prize excludes all flights and transfers as well as any items of a personal nature and any excursions. The prize does not include insurance. 3. The prize must be booked at least eight weeks before departure to avoid disappointment. 4. The prize is capacity controlled, non-negotiable, non-transferable and non-refundable. 5. The winner must be 18 years of age or over. 6. The winner must supply valid passports, visas and where necessary, vaccinations and inoculations for themselves. 7. Full details of how to book will be forwarded to the winner. 8. The closing date for the competition is 11.59pm on 20 March 2015. The organisers' decision is final and no correspondence will be entered into. The winner must agree to participate in any reasonable press or PR activity relating to the competition. 9. Full MSC travel booking conditions apply. 10. MSC reserves the right to alter, amend or foreclose the competition in the event of unforeseen circumstances. 11. The usual Chelsea Magazines terms and conditions apply. Go to chelseamagazines.com/terms for more info. 12. Entry constitutes acceptance of all these terms and conditions.

Tokyo

CITY GUIDE

The strong pound against the yen means that 2015 is a fantastic time to take a cruise from the Japanese capital – and it's definitely worth spending at least a few days exploring this intriguing city, says **Liz Jarvis**



Left to right, from above: Priests at the Meiji Shrine; the Sensō-ji Temple in Asakusa

Tokyo is the kind of city that challenges all your expectations and captures your imagination; as an introduction to Japanese culture it's not to be missed. From the *Blade Runner*-esque neon signs at Shibuya Crossing to the calming atmosphere of the Meiji-Jingu Shinto shrine, Tokyo is a non-stop feast for the senses – and surprisingly you can experience many of the highlights for free.



MUST-SEES

Set in a wonderful evergreen forest with stunning cypress and copper trees and a lake, the Meiji Shrine is where the Japanese pay their respects to the Emperor Meiji and Empress Shōken, and the atmosphere is serene. Visit in the morning and you may be lucky enough to see a traditional Japanese wedding (it's a very popular venue to get married). Meiji is a complete contrast to the

temple at Asakusa, which is much more touristy, but still worth visiting for the spectacle and the nearby Buddhist temple of Sensō-ji. By the moat at the Imperial Palace you can view the magnificent cherry blossom display in spring. Harajuku, close to the Meiji shrine, is where the Harajuku girls hail from with their big false eyelashes and even bigger shoes. And at Shibuya you can see the statue of Hachikō, the loyal dog who waited in vain for his owner to return.



WHAT TO EAT

Foodies will be in their element in Tokyo and, as ever, a top tip is to eat where the locals eat for an authentic experience. You can enjoy a fairly substantial amount of sushi at a conveyor belt restaurant for less than £10, while pork buns – white and fluffy like clouds, filled with deliciously tender meat – can be

bought for just a few pounds. There are lots of high-end restaurants as well, and prices are usually displayed on the menus in the windows.



MUST-TRIES

Karaoke: there are bars all over the city. Sake (pronounced *sah-keh*). And of course Japanese toilets, which feature a myriad of controls for every possible need, have to be tried to be believed. Just don't press the wrong button.



SHOPPING

The Japanese take shopping to a new art form and Tokyo has some of the most elegant and stylish malls in the world, ideal for browsing. Particularly noteworthy is Kitte at Marunouchi in the financial district, which has a fabulous food hall. There's no shortage of affordable stores, either, and there are even

TOKYO IS THE WORLD'S LARGEST CITY BUT THE BEST WAY TO THINK OF THIS SPRAWLING METROPOLIS IS AS A SERIES OF TOWNS



boutiques and grocery stores in the subway. For full-on souvenir heaven, head to the market at Asakusa, while in Harajuku and Shibuya you'll find fashion bargains galore. The Japanese have thought of absolutely everything; there are even places where you can pay to go and stroke rabbits or cats if you don't have a pet at home.



GETTING AROUND

The best way to think of this sprawling metropolis is as a series of towns; and the good news is that moving between them is surprisingly easy. The subway is cheap, clean and fairly simple to understand, although if you get confused (some of the place names can appear to be very similar) then you'll usually find someone willing to help direct you. During rush hour it can get a little crazy (Tokyo is the most populated city in the world) but there are numerous underground

cafés and bars to retreat to. Tokyo is also a very pleasant city to walk around, particularly near the Imperial Palace and Tokyo Station, where the wide pavements are spotless and lined with trees. You can see Mount Fuji (just about) on a clear day from the free observation deck at Bunkyo Civic Center, but if you want to get a bit closer, you'll need to take the train or bus. And if you fancy a day trip from the city, then the Shinkansen or 'bullet train' is one of the best train experiences in the world and surprisingly good value for money.



WHERE TO STAY

The luxurious Palace Hotel Tokyo has an outstanding location close to the Imperial Palace, Tokyo train station and some of the best shopping malls in the city. Rooms have superb views and are deliciously furnished in opulent fabrics and

neutral tones, with marble bathrooms, Nespresso coffee makers and state-of-the-art technology, and the ambience throughout the hotel is sophisticated, with contemporary touches and wonderful art on display. The breakfast is particularly good, with a choice of Japanese and Western dishes on offer. There's also a spa and swimming pool where you can look at the skyline while you relax, while the bars and restaurants (including a teppanyaki grill) are also impeccable. Rates start at JPY52,000 (£292) per room per night including taxes. For more information visit en.palacehoteltokyo.com.

Clockwise from top right:

A view of the Imperial Palace walls from the lobby of the Palace Hotel; an Executive Suite at the hotel; freshly-made pork buns

Go online: To read a review of a Princess cruise from Tokyo go to cruise-international.com/diamond-princess-japanese-cruise-review

River Cruise *news*

SHIPS • EVENTS • DESTINATIONS



ROYAL GODMOTHER FOR UNIWORLD

Uniworld has confirmed that Princess Anita von Hohenberg, the great-granddaughter of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, will christen *S.S. Maria Theresa* at the Amsterdam ceremony in March.

Princess Anita comes from a long line of Habsburgs, one of Europe's oldest sovereign families, dating back to the 15th century. The much-beloved Maria Theresa, the Archduchess of Austria and Empress of the Holy Roman Empire, reigned from 1740 to 1780 as the only female ruler of the Habsburg Empire, and its most successful.

"It's a great honour for me to represent the Habsburg family in Amsterdam and to christen Uniworld's new Super Ship, *S.S. Maria Theresa*, in honour of the great Maria Theresa," said Princess Anita von Hohenberg.

"We are absolutely ecstatic to have Princess Anita von Hohenberg as the godmother of our newest Super Ship, *S.S. Maria Theresa*," said Guy Young, President of Uniworld. "There's no one more deserving of this honour than the direct descendent of Maria Theresa who ruled for 40 years over an extraordinary empire."



NEW SHIPS FOR SCENIC TOURS

Scenic Tours has unveiled two new luxury Super Ships which will start sailing in 2016. *Scenic Spirit* will sail the Mekong, and fuse traditional Asian influences with five-star amenities and modern features like a resort-style pool, steam sauna, bar and open-air cinema. *Scenic Azure* will operate on the Douro River, and offers an intimate experience with capacity for just 96 guests. Both ships will offer Scenic's all-inclusive luxury experience, including private butler service.



CRUISING USA

American Cruise Lines has unveiled plans to begin building a fleet of modern vessels to start cruising on US waterways including the Hudson and Potomac rivers and Alaska's Inside Passage. 🇺🇸

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included
luxurious ships

Discover a level of luxury that's unique on a river cruise ship, from spacious suites that come replete with lavish features and fine finishing touches, to a choice of on-board dining venues, bars and beautiful public areas.



included
every drink

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included
flexibility

Personalise your days with must-see attractions with our Scenic *FreeChoice* programme. Indulge in unforgettable experiences with Scenic *Enrich* highlights. Explore at your own pace with our unique *Tailormade* GPS device.



included
all meals

Fantastic cuisine and fine dining is an important part of the Scenic Tours experience. Choose from a range of on-board dining venues: the beautiful Crystal Restaurant, the delicious Portobello's and the casual River Café.



included
butler service

No matter your cabin grade, our renowned butler service is included and available to each and every guest. It's a level of luxury that's uncommon on the rivers of Europe, but something our guests have come to expect.

To book or request your brochure and DVD call us **FREE** on **0808 102 1251** or visit **www.scenictours.co.uk**. We're open 7 days a week.



Terms and Conditions: Price of £1,295 is based on two people sharing a Cat. E Stateroom on the 8-day Eastern Enlightenment cruise departing in April 2015 and is subject to availability at the time of booking. Supplements apply for upgraded accommodation and suites with balconies. Butler services vary depending on cabin category. New Year Sale offer of up to £4,200 per couple is valid on selected departures in 2015 only when booked before 28th February 2015. Maximum saving of £4,200 per couple is applicable on April departures of the Romantic Rhine & Moselle cruise only. Offers valid for new bookings only made between 12th February and 28th February 2015. New Year Sale offer is not combinable with any other offer. Flights from London Heathrow are included in the price. Regional departures from a choice of 15 UK airports or travel by Eurostar are available from £95 per person. All drinks are included on-board except for a very small number of rare, fine and vintage wines, champagnes and spirits. A 1.5% credit card charge may apply when booking. Prices correct at time of going to print (January 2015). For full itineraries and booking conditions, please see our 2015 Luxury River Cruise brochure or visit www.scenictours.co.uk.





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Award after award confirm river cruise holidays with Uniworld as the very best. Deluxe vessels, expertly designed and sumptuously decorated by the acclaimed Red Carnation Hotels team, are the best on the great rivers that they serve. Uniworld is the only river cruise operator to be recommended by the prestigious Zagat Survey for both its river-view staterooms and its fine dining. The very highest service levels are assured by the unparalleled staff to guest ratio. And a choice of included shore excursions at every major port of call, truly all-inclusive value with all premium drinks, gratuities and Wi-Fi covered in your holiday price, and complimentary door-to-door transfers wherever you live in the UK (from Uniworld's exclusive partner, Titan) complete the picture of a perfect river cruise experience.

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T's & C's apply. Calls free from BT landlines, mobiles may vary. † Excludes Scottish islands and Sark. ‡ Only on European itineraries, excludes Russia, the Mekong and China.
*Standard inclusions listed; may differ slightly by operator.

There are river cruises, and there are Uniworld Boutique River Cruises



WHY CHOOSE UNIWORLD?

Other Cruises* Uniworld Cruises

Door to door transfers wherever you live in the UK†	•	•
Scheduled flights with world-renowned airlines	•	•
A range of outstanding itineraries, Europe and worldwide	•	•
The finest vessels on the rivers they serve	•	•
Sumptuous interiors designed by Red Carnation Hotels	•	•
River-view staterooms	•	•
The best river-view staterooms as acclaimed by Zagat Survey	•	•
Onboard fine dining	•	•
The best onboard fine dining as acclaimed by Zagat Survey	•	•
Included shore excursions	•	•
A choice of included shore excursions at every major port	•	•
Complimentary wine with lunch and dinner	•	•
All-inclusive value , fine wine and premium brand drinks‡	•	•
All gratuities, onboard and ashore, included	•	•
Complimentary Wi-Fi onboard	•	•
Sublimely relaxing onboard spa centre	•	•
Complimentary use of bicycles and Nordic walking sticks	•	•
Comfortable transfers to and from the ship	•	•
Early booking discounts	•	•
PLUS River Heritage Club discounts for past travellers	•	•



Rudesheim, The Rhine,
Hesse, Germany



THE BEST *European* RIVER CRUISES 2015

From the incredible Rhine to the endless wonders of the Douro valley, Europe's rivers offer breathtaking landscapes and culturally rich cities.

Nick Dalton selects the most exciting itineraries for the year ahead

There's nothing quite like sitting on deck, the sun on your face, as you slip through the heart of Europe. A river cruise is an experience that hypnotises and enthralls with its constantly changing scenery. It's a revelation how the waterways twist and turn, passing the gorges one moment, the gentle countryside the next. European river cruises span the continent, from the North Sea to the Mediterranean, and delve deep into former Eastern Bloc countries.

If you've never cruised before, this is a great way to start. You'll never get bored as there are different places to explore every day, and many excursions are included – think of it as an escorted tour on the water. It's also a great reason to go if you're a veteran of river cruising

as you can always head off on your own since the ships mostly dock in the heart of a city or town – opposite or near Budapest's iconic parliament building, for instance.

River cruising has changed dramatically in the past few years, becoming a cutting-edge holiday on elegant ships with contemporary design and fine food, a bit like being in a top boutique hotel. A number of cruises are all-inclusive (and many of the others offer wine with meals) so there's little extra to pay for.

Cruise companies are falling over themselves to provide new attractions, too, whether classical concerts or dinners with locals, festivals or wine tastings. A river cruise offers the relaxation that no other holiday can. Here are some of the ones to look out for... ►►



Top to bottom: Sunrise in Avignon, France; mosaic in the old town, Arles



GALLIC STYLE

The perfect way to see idyllic French towns and acres of verdant countryside is to take a cruise on one of Belmond's spacious luxury floating vessels. Its six-night *Belmond Afloat in France Wine Academy* cruise, new for this summer, travels from Tain L'Hermitage to Chalon-sur-Saône, through the vineyards of the Rhône and Gevrey-Chambertin regions, with tutored tastings. There are scenic tours to UNESCO-listed Lyon, gourmet lunches and a visit to the famous Château de Pommard estate.

Belmond's ships are available for private hire, some on a per-cabin basis. A week-long cruise through Burgundy costs from £33,500 based on eight people travelling, including private car transfer from Paris, all meals and drinks on board, private sightseeing and local transfers (belmond.com/afloat-in-france/0845 556 7276). ▶▶

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AWARD-WINNING RIVER CRUISES

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Our fleet of award-winning 'Star-Ships' are amongst the newest on the waters of Europe. Innovative, stylish and contemporary, they strive to bring the highlights of ocean cruising to the intimacy of the river. Every element of an Emerald Waterways holiday is meticulously planned and crafted, from the ingenious on-board heated pool that transforms into a cinema to the culturally enlightening itineraries that characterise your days. And it doesn't matter if you opt to stay in our spacious Emerald Staterooms or a chic Grand Balcony Suite, every guest enjoys a fully-inclusive service that means all on-board meals, drinks with lunch and dinner and daily excursions are all included in the price of your cruise. Where else can you unpack once and wake up somewhere new each day? Experience our unique floating hotel and experience the future of river cruising.



Your contemporary retreat

We offer a great choice of cabins, but regardless of where you choose to lay your head, you'll enjoy your own en-suite bathroom, hotel-style bed, flat screen TV, infotainment system, Wi-Fi and bottled water restocked daily.



Keeping glasses topped up

To accompany lunch and dinner, you'll enjoy a carefully selected collection of red and white wines, beers and soft drinks, all of which are complimentary when you dine. What's more, coffee and tea is always free, so help yourself.



Something you wouldn't expect

We don't aim to meet your expectations; we aim to surpass them. That's why our deluxe ships boast a heated pool with a retractable roof and bar, so you can wake up and take an early morning dip before the day begins.



A view especially for you

While other operators offer a French Balcony, we bring the outdoors in with our Balcony Suites. At the touch of a button, our innovative open-air system's window drops down to let the air in and unveil full panoramic views.



Our award-winning fleet

After one year on Europe's rivers we earned the title of 'Best New River Ship' at the Cruise Critic Editors' Pick Awards 2014 where they cited Emerald as 'a modern, innovative option for European river cruising without breaking the bank'.



Unique on-board innovations

On selected evenings, the heated pool area is transformed into an oasis of entertainment. As the water disappears, a cinema screen showing a collection of classic and contemporary films is revealed.

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Terms and Conditions: Prices are per person based on two people sharing the lowest available cabin at time of print (January 2015) and are based on the Rhine-Main Discovery river cruise departing in July 2015. Supplements apply for upgraded accommodation. Single supplements available on request, please call for details. Price includes £500 saving. Price and saving is correct at time of going to print (January 2015) and are subject to flight and cruise availability at the time of booking and may change/incur a supplement. 1.5% credit card charge will apply. For full itineraries and booking conditions, please see our 2015 river cruise brochure or visit www.emeraldwaterways.co.uk.



EXCURSIONS FIT FOR A KING

Royal Invitation Experiences are the new thing at APT Cruises – excursions fit for a king that you won't find anywhere else – and they're perfectly highlighted on the company's signature *Magnificent Europe* cruise. The voyage follows the Rhine and Danube across five countries from Amsterdam to Budapest. In Germany, near Cologne, Princess Heide von Hohenzollern opens the doors of Burg Nymphenburg Castle for APT guests who can wander around the opulent rooms and exquisite gardens before sitting down to a banquet. In Passau

a classic train with drinks and music takes you to Salzburg for *The Sound of Music* tour. And in Vienna there's a cocktail reception at the City Palace followed by an orchestral concert and vocals by members of the Mozart Boys' Choir. There are plenty of other excursions too, plus a day and night in Budapest.

The 15-day Royal Collection *Magnificent Europe* cruise from APT departs regularly, from £4,640pp all-inclusive, including flights, excursions and home transfers (0800 046 3002/aptouring.co.uk).



PHOTOS: © AWL IMAGES/NEIL FARRIN/MONIKA DRESSEL

ON APT'S MAGNIFICENT EUROPE CRUISE YOU CAN ENJOY PLENTY OF
EXCURSIONS, INCLUDING A DAY AND A NIGHT IN GORGEOUS BUDAPEST



From left to right: Burg Namedy Castle;
the Chain Bridge, Matthias Church and
Fisherman's Bastion, Budapest

Porto, Portugal,
on the Douro



VINTAGE PORTUGAL

Scenic Tours' latest 'Space-Ship', *Scenic Azure*, launches in April 2016, custom-built for the confines of Portugal's Douro. With a length of only 80m, it's designed to navigate the narrow river yet still show off Scenic's trademark luxury, with a ratio of two crew members to each guest. Unlike many Douro cruises which start with a hotel stay in Lisbon, this concentrates solely on the beauty of the sun-drenched river with an 11-day return trip from Porto. Many of the planned daily experiences are not available on

other cruises, including fine dining in Porto followed by a performance of local music.

The scenery is of stepped vineyards and craggy valley walls and there are stops at a number of pretty towns – some that other cruises don't call at – on an itinerary rich with gastronomy and plenty of meals taken on shore.

The 11-day *Douro* cruise from Scenic Tours departs regularly, from £3,495pp, all-inclusive, with flights and excursions (0808 102 1405/scenictours.co.uk).



Top-bottom: Traditional windmill, the Netherlands; the Rhine valley

DRAMATIC VISTAS

There are cruises that do the Rhine and Danube, and others that take the Rhine from the North Sea to Basel but this new offering concentrates on the northern stretch along with the Main, connecting Amsterdam with Nuremberg. The delightful trip through Germany and the Netherlands sees the scenery change from high-sided river valley to the flatlands, taking in the dramatic Rhine Gorge and the mighty Lorelei Rock. Stops vary from quaint Miltenberg – like Bavaria of the Middle Ages come to life – to the sophisticated and historic city of Cologne. In Amsterdam you spend the night on the water, with a glass-top boat canal cruise thrown in. Emerald's fleet of four ships is the newest in Europe; they're sleek and modern.

The eight-day *Rhine-Main Discovery* cruise from Emerald Waterways departs 11 and 18 July, from £1,595pp, including flights, excursions and wine with dinner (0808 102 0157/emeraldwaterways.co.uk). ►►

A CRUISE ON THE RHINE THROUGH GERMANY TAKES YOU THROUGH PICTURESQUE VALLEYS



GERMAN CHARM

A river that's growing in popularity, the Elbe is narrow and winding and requires a special (and shorter) kind of ship to navigate it through the lush countryside of Eastern Europe. Viking has built two new ships bringing its number on the river to four for the charming journey between Magdeburg, a short coach ride from Berlin, and Prague in the Czech Republic. The scenery is, on the whole, less dramatic than the Danube and Rhine although a stretch of Alpine cliffs through an area of Germany dubbed 'Saxon Switzerland' is quite spectacular.

And the medieval castles and towns are as impressive as those anywhere – calls include the spa town of Bad Schandau, the reborn city of Dresden and the classically pretty Czech town of Litoměřice. There are also hotel nights in Berlin and Prague with city tours of both of these iconic cities.

The 10-day *Elegant Elbe* cruise from Viking Cruises departs regularly from March to October, from £3,095pp including flights, excursions and wine with meals (0800 319 6660/vikingcruises.co.uk).

Germany's magnificent
'Saxon Switzerland' region

The Hungarian Parliament Building, Budapest, is one of the Danube's most spellbinding sights



A CLASSIC VOYAGE

If the hilltop towers and the waterfront palaces of the Danube are the timeless sights of central Europe, then this is the classic European river cruise. The journey takes you between Nuremberg in Germany and the Hungarian capital, Budapest and visits the classical Austrian city of Vienna as well as passing through Bratislava, the Slovakian capital. You can't fail to fall in love with Vienna's grand buildings and graceful streets

(best seen from a crowded tram) or the wonders of Budapest, as well as lesser-known places such as Melk, with its hilltop abbey, and Passau, where the Danube meets the Inn and Ilz rivers.

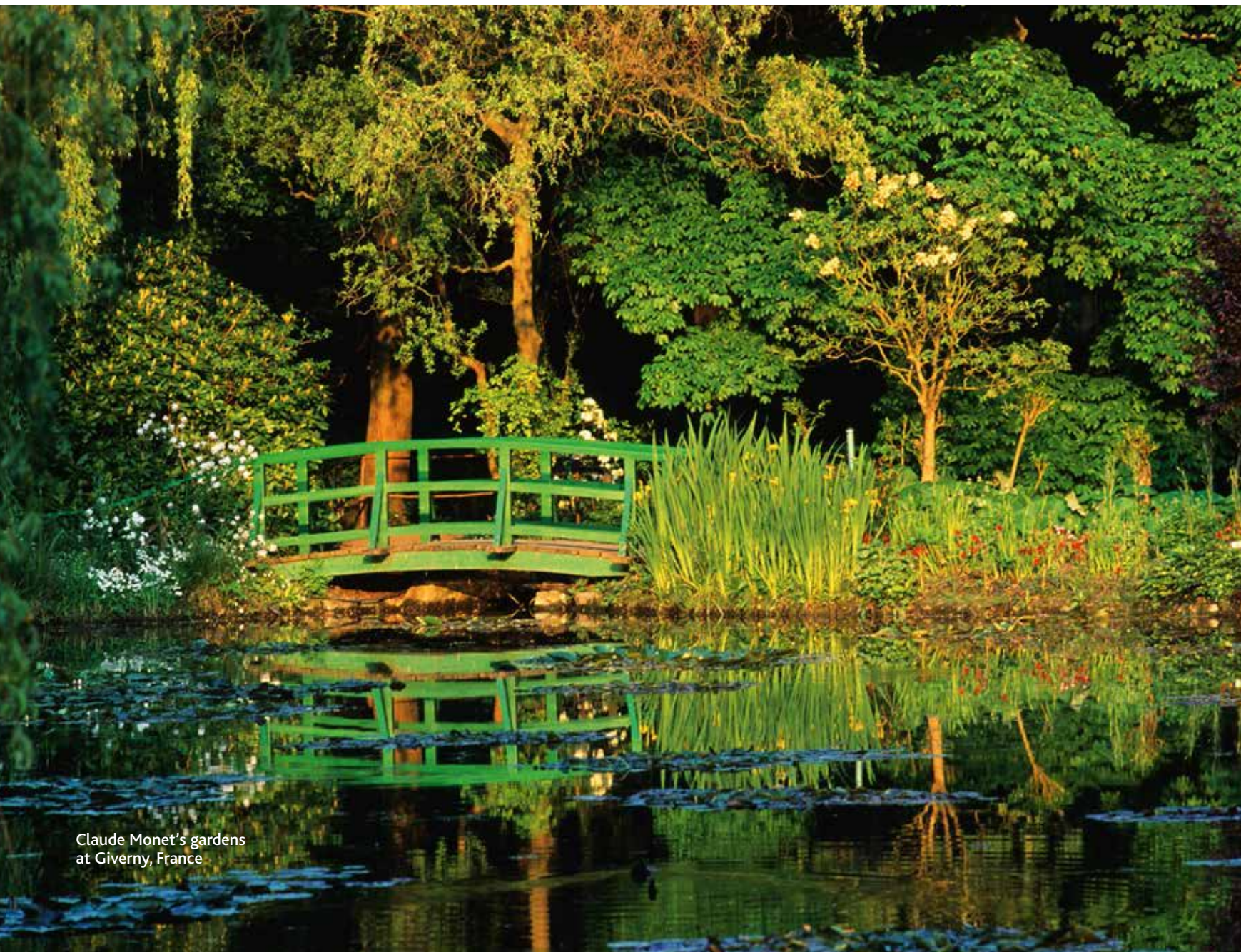
The eight-day *Romantic Danube* cruise from Viking Cruises departs regularly, from £2,145pp including flights, excursions and wine with meals (0800 319 6660/vikingcruises.co.uk).



ULTIMATE FRANCE

Not one cruise but three, exploring France in luxury from top to bottom. Firstly there's a week's cruise on the Seine, the green of northern France, all the way from Paris to Honfleur and back, visiting Monet's garden at Giverny as well as the Normandy beaches, and with a night in Paris. A TGV whizzes you across to Bordeaux on the west coast for a Gironde and Garonne cruise, visiting St Émilien and a leading wine estate, plus lots of tastings and foodie tours. A flight to Marseille and transfer to historic Avignon sets you up for a cruise on the Rhône and Saône, visiting the city of Lyon and the Beaune wine region, a warm, sheltered area that has the sun-drenched feel of the south while being on the edge of the Alps.

The 22-day *Ultimate France* cruise from Uniworld with Titan Travel departs regularly, from £7,999pp all-inclusive, including flights, excursions and award-winning VIP Home Departure Service (0800 988 5873/ titantravel.co.uk/uniworld). ▶▶



Claude Monet's gardens
at Giverny, France



DANUBE *Delights*

The boutique river cruise line Uniworld launches new 'super ship' S.S. Maria Theresa in 2015, and takes you across some of Europe's greatest waterways in total luxury

If you want to enjoy boutique-style ships and an all-inclusive signature 'six star' experience, then Uniworld is the perfect choice. Sailing the world's best waterways, Uniworld's 130-capacity ships have the highest staff-to-guest ratio in the river cruise industry and from its partnership with Red Carnation hotels, the company has transformed its ships into floating luxury boutique hotels.

In 2015 Uniworld will see the launch of its new Super Ship, S.S. Maria Theresa. Named after the Archduchess of Austria and Queen of Hungary and Bohemia, the ship will join *River Empress* sailing on the *European Jewels* itinerary, a 15-day cruise from Budapest to Amsterdam. In partnership with award-winning escorted tour operator Titan, the cruise takes in the Danube, Main and Rhine rivers, with excursions to some of the historic cities along their banks.

In March and April 2015 S.S. Maria Theresa will also sail on selected dates for the 10-day *Tulips and Windmills* itinerary, while later in December


2015 it will offer a *Danube Christmas Markets* cruise. The new ship will feature Uniworld's distinctive design, decorated with original hand-picked artworks, classic furnishings and antiques.

In the third edition of the *Titan Uniworld 2015* river cruise brochure, discover the 13-day *Jewels of Spain, Portugal and the Douro* cruise, where wine and culture lovers will be in their element. This cruise will give passengers the chance to experience the unique landscape and delights of the Douro River valley.

For the first time four new 'escorted river cruise-and-tour' itineraries add a land-based element to the classic Uniworld river cruises. For example, experience the 10-night *Spirit of Bordeaux and the Dordogne* itinerary, perfect for wine connoisseurs, adding a three-night stay in a luxury hotel set in the world-famous vineyards of the Dordogne with the seven-night Bordeaux cruise on board *River Royale*.

All restaurants on Uniworld's ships use the finest and the freshest ingredients and are accompanied by expert sommeliers

while guests can also enjoy unlimited beverages, from rich selections of craft and local beers, to spirits, soft drinks, speciality teas and coffees. And the best part is that the 2015 European cruises, excluding Russia, are all-inclusive, with prices covering all gratuities, unlimited wine, beer, spirits and soft drinks throughout and onboard wifi.

With river-view staterooms, full board fine dining, expert-guided shore excursions and door-to-door transfers from any UK address as part of Titan's VIP Home Departure Service, Uniworld makes sure it has it all covered. 

titan SEE THE WORLD DIFFERENTLY **UNIWORLD** BOUTIQUE RIVER CRUISE COLLECTION

Go online: For more information or to book call Titan on 0800 988 5175 or visit www.titantravel.co.uk/uniworld



Fireworks over the majestic twin spires of Cologne Cathedral



LOW COUNTRY HIGHS

This delightful cruise combines a touch of the classic Rhine with the best of the Low Countries on a circular trip. The holiday starts with a Channel crossing (by ferry not cruise ship) and a coach to the historic German city of Cologne. From there cool, modern *A-Rosa Viva* heads north and into the Netherlands, passing the lakes of Markermeer and IJsselmeer. First stop is pretty Hoorn, once an important home base for the Dutch East India Company, then on to Amsterdam. Then there's Rotterdam and the Dutch Delta before reaching Ghent and Antwerp, Belgium, and calling at Arnhem before getting back to Cologne. Healthy meals with a Mediterranean influence are served buffet-style and there's a pool on the sun deck.

A-Rosa offers an eight-day *Highlights of Belgium and the Netherlands* cruise through Titan Travel from £1,399pp, departing June, July and September, all-inclusive with excursions and VIP Home Departure Service (0800 988 5873/titantravel.co.uk). 🇳🇱



Wine

ON THE RHINE

Julie Peasgood enjoys architecture, cycling, musical boxes and more sailing on luxury river ship AmaCerto



Left: The iconic twin spires of Cologne's imposing Gothic cathedral, built in the 13th century

We are cycling in convoy along a peaceful towpath bordering the Rhine. The sun is shining, the air is clear, my daughter Kate is pedalling away just ahead of me, and I haven't felt so carefree in a long time. This could be because I'm getting fit and hopefully shedding some calories (always a bonus on a cruise). It could be that as this is a wine-themed itinerary, the bike tours are combined with a wine tasting. Or maybe it's just that I've finally fulfilled my promise to myself of joining a guided cycle ride.

Whatever the reason, Kate and I are both hooked and sign up for as many two-wheeled trips as we can. They make a fun alternative to the more traditional coach tours and are a great way to see the sights, even with the occasional wine-induced wobble (joking apart, the routes taken are mostly along quiet cycle paths and safety is always a priority).

What's also prioritised is comfort on board – this is one of the most laid-back cruises I have ever been on. Mornings are gentle with late risers catered for and excursions starting at a civilised hour, and when we are sailing our passage is so smooth it's sometimes hard to tell we're even moving. The crew are charming too – attentive and keen to help in any way they can.

AmaCerto is one of the new generation of vessels in AmaWaterways' fleet, and it's like a floating New York hotel. Staterooms are stylish, spacious and beautifully decorated in subtle greys, browns and silvers, and the dining room and lounge are spacious and inviting. Even more expansive is the sun deck, complete with heated pool and a hot tub for the brave (we choose to snuggle up under thick blankets and sip hot chocolate).

It's a refreshing way to experience the Rhine, Europe's most important waterway, flowing from Switzerland to the North Sea, snaking through three countries and bordering three more. Our cruise journeys from Amsterdam to Basel, taking in magnificent Cologne with its 13th-century Gothic cathedral, Koblenz with its ancient fortress, and the splendidly unpronounceable Wijk bij Duurstede.

On our fourth day we sail the most scenic stretch of the entire river, the superb Rhine Gorge, peppered with so many medieval castles (over 30





SOAK UP SOME CULTURE AT THE REMAINS
OF HEIDELBERG'S CASTLE OR HEAD DOWN
TO THE CITY'S ROMANTIC CAFÉ KNÖSEL FOR
A SENSATIONAL HOT CHOCOLATE



Above: Julie with her daughter, Kate.

Left: Night falling over Heidelberg and the illuminated remains of its gorgeous castle

PHOTOS: © GETTY

in a 40-mile stretch) that it's listed as a UNESCO World Heritage site. No other river in the world has a greater concentration of castles and castle ruins. At the deepest, narrowest and most treacherous point of the valley lies the legendary Lorelei Rock, soaring 120 metres above the waterline, with a statue of the deadly siren surveying the passing river traffic from its top.

But it is pretty, half-timbered Rudesheim that captures our hearts – especially Siegfried's Mechanical Music Cabinet Museum, waiting to enchant us at the end of the Gorge. Rudesheim is renowned for its Riesling (which we sample in a local winery to wash down giant, chewy pretzels) and the cobbled, pedestrian-friendly Drosselgasse, crammed with souvenir shops, restaurants and wine taverns. The must-see museum is unique though, housing Germany's greatest collection of centuries-old, self-playing musical instruments, as well as an 11th-century church boasting a spectacular painted, vaulted ceiling and tiled floor. An enormous steam organ with 27 dolls each playing a different instrument was much admired, but both Kate and I fall in love with a silver filigree musical box, exquisitely crafted and hiding a tiny enamelled nightingale tweeting at the top of its mechanical lungs.

The next morning finds me wondering how on earth I can justify spending a small fortune on a tinkly clockwork box (all I can say is the Rudesheim Riesling is very potent). I am in my element with the German wines on this cruise – I particularly love Gewürtztraminer – and we are treated to an array of fine vintages at each mealtime on board, as well as on our excursions. We discover the joys of grey Burgundy (a heady mixture of walnuts and grapefruit) and that Kate in fact prefers the wine produced from grapes grown in volcanic soil, while I am rather partial to a racy Pinot Noir, another speciality of this region. »





Left: Picturesque Ehrenfels Castle by the town of Rüdesheim, Germany; a selection of typical German wines in a local market; Strasbourg's Kléber Square is the city's largest and is full of Renaissance charm



I am also drawn to the sensational hot chocolate served in the romantic Café Knösel in Heidelberg, our next destination. Huge, milky mugs containing at least 1,000 calories – the only thing to do is to give in gracefully and have a mountainous slab of home-made almond cake as well. Any weight gain can then be walked off along the Hauptstrasse, one of the longest shopping streets in Germany. Or soak up some culture with a visit to the ruins of Heidelberg Castle. And if, like me, you love ancient deep blue apothecary jars, then the German Pharmacy Museum, located within the castle catacombs, houses more than 20,000 chemist-related products, and is well worth a visit.

From Heidelberg it is a short sail on to another bastion of good food and wine: Strasbourg, capital of France's Alsace region. Overflowing with Renaissance architecture, our guided walk around the city takes in the Notre Dame Cathedral (with its famous astronomical clock, one of Europe's finest) and the picturesque medieval bridges spanning the River Ill. We also enjoy an optional tour to Klipfel, a winery in Obernai, travelling through achingly pretty, half-timbered villages and wishing I could linger in each one.

But Ama saves the best till last. Our final port of call is Breisach in Germany, gateway to the Black Forest, and home to local winery, Die Oberrotweiler. This family-run enterprise offers some of the most exceptional wines I have ever tasted, at remarkably reasonable prices too. And we've certainly earned this tasting, having cycled for two hours through woods, quaint villages and alongside fields, with the storybook Black Forest always in the distance. It is a fitting end to an itinerary called *Enchanting Rhine*. 🍷



GETTING THERE

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Got a question about cruise holidays? Get in touch with our experts at info@cruise-international.com

THIS ISSUE'S EXPERTS



Julie Peasgood is a TV presenter, travel expert and Contributing Editor for *Cruise International*



Liz Jarvis is a well-known travel expert and the Editor of *Cruise International*



Deborah Stone is an award-winning writer and Contributing Editor for *Cruise International*



Q India has always been my dream holiday destination. Are there any specific cruises that go there?

A. Yes, plenty. They are often part of a long cruise from South Africa and across the Indian Ocean to India's west coast, or a similarly extended cruise from Singapore or elsewhere in the Far East. Cochin, Mangalore and Goa are among the ports visited but it is Mumbai (formerly known as Bombay) that figures in almost all ocean cruises to India because it is often a jumping-off point for a land-based tour of the region known as the Golden Triangle: the historic inland cities of Jaipur, Agra and Delhi. Cultural cruise specialists Voyages to Antiquity have two or three cruises a year that leave from Singapore, usually including Golden

Triangle tours, but if you want to see more of the countryside you could opt for a river cruise. The Brahmaputra River runs through spectacular Assam, while the Hugli River has summer cruises in West Bengal, and the sacred Ganges River reveals India's spiritual heritage. APT Luxury Touring & Cruising's regular *Spirit of India* tours start with seven days in the Golden Triangle cities then a week on the Ganges visiting places such as Kalna, the 'City of Temples' and Mayapur. APT also has cruises of the Kerala Backwaters, to explore the canals, lagoons and lakes by houseboat, combined with a land tour. [Deborah Stone](#)

Q I'm trying to get in shape this year. Which cruise lines are best for wellness?

A. Contrary to popular opinion, it is possible to lose weight on a cruise (or at least stay the same size as when you boarded) and it's certainly easy to get fit. Many onboard gyms feature state-of-the-art equipment and creative workouts like Spinning classes and Kinesis Walls, as well as the more common Pilates, Zumba and yoga. In addition there are jogging/walking tracks and various on shore activities including cycling, hiking and kayaking. MSC, winners of *Cruise International's* 2014 Best for Wellbeing Award, leaves no hot stone unturned in its quest to please passengers, offering tennis, mini golf, volleyball and basketball, plus the opportunity to be thoroughly pampered in its Aurea Spa. Celebrity Cruises is also a leader of the pack, with an extensive range of luxury treatments in its award-winning Canyon Ranch Spa. Look out too for P&O Cruises' *Ventura*, sporting Trixter bikes in its gym (the latest in indoor cycling) and a swim-against-the-current pool. Princess's larger vessels also offer pools with adjustable

currents for endurance training, as well as fitness centres at the front of its larger ships, so you can enjoy sweeping views of the ocean as you work out. Royal Caribbean offer ground-breaking options such as onboard ice-skating, surfing, boxing and a boot camp. Last but not least, Cunard features a huge rock-climbing wall on *Queen Mary 2*, and an outdoor promenade perfect for speed walking and running. **Julie Peasgood**



Q Does my husband have to wear a tuxedo on our cruise's formal night?

A. I don't know of any cruise lines that insist on you wearing a tuxedo for formal night, although some of the more traditional lines, for example Cunard, do offer guidelines including 'tuxedo, dinner jacket or dark suit' for men. Even on P&O's Black Tie night men can wear a 'dark lounge or business suit' as an alternative to black tie; and on some of the US-owned lines I've seen guests interpreting formal night

in all kinds of different ways. Men should certainly make an effort to wear a jacket, and you may want to wear a long gown, but a cocktail dress is also absolutely fine. Wear whatever you feel good in, add a pair of sparkly earrings and heels and you'll be ready to go. Dressing up for formal night adds a sense of glamour and occasion, but the most important thing is that you feel comfortable – it's your holiday, after all. **Liz Jarvis**



THE INSIDER



Our regular column from **Andy Harmer**, Director of the Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA) UK & Ireland

When I took my first job within the cruise industry I have to admit it all seemed rather mysterious. I didn't fully understand what it had to offer – cruising was for 'other people' and I thought that whatever happened on board didn't have any relevance to me or to my day-to-day life.

But how wrong I was, and perhaps more importantly, how things have changed even in a relatively short period of time.

The rapid rise in the number of people choosing to take a cruise holiday, together with the huge range of cruise lines, ships and places to visit, means that today a cruise holiday is exactly for people like me.

There are more than 50 cruise lines marketing themselves to British and Irish consumers, who between them offer family fun, expedition-style trips, ultra-luxury pampering, cultural visits, river exploration, fun from morning to night, and pretty much everything in-between.

Indeed the cruise lines have been working extremely hard to differentiate themselves, not only from other mainstream holidays but from their cruise line competitors. It is now much easier for us to find the cruise that provides us with the perfect holiday, whether we're a solo traveller or on holiday with friends or family.

Over the past few years there has been a significant increase in the use of recognisable 'brands' on board ships, whether that's around dining, entertainment or children's activities; well-known consumer names that we can relate to in our everyday lives.

And the two new ships sailing from Southampton this year are a very good example of this.

On Royal Caribbean's *Anthem of the Seas* you will find a Jamie Oliver restaurant, Xbox video games and the hit show *Mamma Mia*. Meanwhile on P&O Cruises' *Britannia* you will discover the P&O Food Heroes in force with James Martin, Atul Kochhar and Olly Smith, Marco Pierre White and Eric Lanlard.

Other ships also have partnerships, with everything from the hit show *Hairspray*, coffee chain Starbucks, children's toy brand LEGO, the iconic TV character SpongeBob SquarePants and even Dr Seuss.

And in the next four years we are likely to see another popular UK brand setting up its very own cruise line – Richard Branson's Miami-based Virgin Cruises will be building its own ships for launch at the end of the decade.

The arrival of these established brands not only demonstrates the place now held by cruising within the travel sector, but also demonstrates the wide choice we have when it comes to choosing the cruise line that meets our needs – even if we have a craving for Green Eggs and Ham. 🐔

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A phenomenal waterspout seen from P&O's Arcadia. Michael Ince



My wife and I at the roulette tables in the casino of QM2. Graham Mellers



Our Legend of the Seas room steward left us daily surprises. Jodi Posner



The beauty of Molde in Norway seen from Celebrity Constellation. Patricia Daniels

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I would love to travel down the Amazon River. My second cousin has been and told me how incredible it was.



My favourite holiday memory is travelling the West Coast of America with my husband. We stopped at Yosemite National Park I recall, set up our tent and slept under the redwood trees. It was the most amazing night of our life. Until you're there you can't open up to nature properly.



Elisabeth von Trapp

The celebrated singer will be appearing on board two special Uniworld cruises this summer



I knew Maria von Trapp, who was my father Werner's stepmother, very well. She spoke at my graduation and I was at her bedside when she died. It was wonderful to have the chance to get to know her. She was a very vibrant, amazing woman, but not at all like Julie Andrews.

GETTING THERE

Titan, in partnership with Uniworld, is offering two departures with Elisabeth von Trapp on the eight-day *Enchanting Danube* cruise, on 26 July from £2,449pp or 2 August from £2,679pp. Cost includes flights, seven nights full board on *River Beatrice*, transfers, excursions, entertainment, unlimited complimentary drinks, gratuities, wifi, taxes and Titan's VIP Home Departure Service (titantravel.co.uk/0800 988 5873).



The *Sound of Music*'s appeal is multi-faceted. Capturing a historical moment, the film follows a family as it makes a stand against tyranny and ultimately wins by sticking together to survive. It gives hope to and inspires so many, not least the millions of people who were displaced during the war.

I'm currently working on an album of Rodgers and Hammerstein music to mark the 50th anniversary of the filming of *The Sound of Music*. And on this year's Uniworld cruise I will be hosting tours at the Von Trapp family villa in Salzburg, where I will also sing for the guests.

People who go on cruises have an open heart and they want to enrich their lives by experiencing different cultures. The beauty of being on these ships is that you can visit a new place every day, and it's so stress-free. They organise everything so brilliantly and it's all included; with tours of Budapest and onboard wine tastings, you're entertained the whole time. 🍷

WORDS: FLORA HUGHES-ONSLOW PHOTOS: © ISTOCK/HANNELORE ARMSTORFER

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